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IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS
LIVES OF THE LATER KINGS
Volume 1

BY

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1 KINGS CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

This section of the book of First Kings is overshadowed by the final words of the Lord to Solomon. These were words of warning and words of judgement. 1 Kings 11:9-13, 2 Chronicles 9:22-31. The writer of the Chronicles account leaves out the judgement section, and opens the door for us to believe that Solomon may have repented towards the end of his life, and it may be that Ecclesiastes are the words of the older repentant king as he is dying.

I personally hope that is the case, and the Chronicler is careful of such things, emphasising the spiritual, so we can hope that this is true, but it is only a hope, and as we will see in the life of Rehoboam, a tenuous one. Even if Solomon himself does repent and recover his spiritual life he doesn't, for some reason, brief his son Rehoboam on what to do when he takes over the kingdom.

In chapter 11 of First Kings (volume 1) we have heard that Jeroboam has been given the northern ten tribes by God in punishment for Solomon's great sins. Jeroboam is an evil man at heart, and so the Chronicler will not even mention his kingship except where it meets with that of the line of David and Solomon. Even though the prophecy of Ahijah has already been given and the matter is settled as far as history is concerned, the story is told in this chapter of how the plan of God works out without violating the free will of men.

Prophetic pronouncements come from the entire Character of God, not just from God's sovereignty, nor just from His foreknowledge. The Calvinist and Arminian theologians argue about this and thereby show their limited comprehension of the difference between eternity and time. Their entire debate is what is called in Philosophy a "Category Mistake"; they are debating about God as if He is in the limited category of created men, like them, but He is far beyond any creature, for He is the creator.

We are creatures of space and time, and God is the author and creator of space and time. There is no priority or temporality with God in His decision making, for He sees all of time as one, and so can make prophetic pronouncements through His prophets without any error, and also without violating the free will choices of the men involved. It is our understanding of this truth that sets us free from foolish and time wasting theological debates.

As we walk through these chapters we will see men who are all good examples of the outworking of God's Plan and their own free will choices. They are all inheritors of their father Solomon's Old Sin Nature, but they make their own choices and they are nearly always bad ones. They have their father's weaknesses, and at times his strengths, but each and every one of them is held responsible by the Lord for their choices.

God, from beyond space and time can have His prophets utter accurate prophetic words, but they do not constrain man's choices, nor excuse the men involved from their choices. All of us are born with the genetic propensity to sin in some areas and not in others, and to be capable in some areas and not in others. What we build upon this genetic foundation is what we are judged for. It is the choice of man to obey or disobey their creator and saviour that is at the heart of this world.

Each of the kings of the southern two tribes, (now called the kingdom of Judah), have both strengths and weaknesses, which the writer explores as he examines their choices. He contrasts these with the men and women who lead the northern ten tribes, (now called the kingdom of Israel), and explores their interaction with each other. The kings of Judah all have their line traceable back to David, through Solomon, where-as the kings of the Northern Kingdom are from other tribes, and often are adventurers and coup leaders. There are strong contrasts between the two lines, for there is no king of the North who is referred to as good; all are referred to as evil in God's sight.

Some of the southern monarchs are believers, and a few are great ones, but there is no believer who ever rules in the North. Every king of Israel is a religious pagan, and the people as a whole enter whole-heartedly into the paganism that Solomon brought back into the heart of his kingdom. Idolatry has been the enemy of Israel since they left Egypt, and the words of God concerning it were clear. Exodus 20:1-4. It is this persistence by Israel in following after the evils of the nations that surrounded them that lead to their departure as a national group from the pages of history. In 720 BC, after just over 250 years, Israel disappears into Assyrian captivity. What happens to the ten tribes? Are they lost?

We get the immediate answer to this question about the destiny of the ten northern tribes in the New Testament books and letters. Refer to Acts 26:4-8, and read the words of Paul before King Agrippa, and then to the earliest of the New Testament books, the book of James 1:1. Both men speak of the "Twelve Tribes", and no-one corrects them, for all knew members of all twelve tribes were alive at the time and active members of the nation of Israel.

What happened then in 720BC when the Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom into captivity? We will see this clearly when our study brings us there, but be encouraged now, that the entire membership of the ten northern tribes was not exterminated by the Assyrians. Many fled south into Judah, for those who were spiritual amongst the northern group saw that their spiritual home was there. Even though most in the north rejected the true faith there was always a remnant who

did follow the truth and worshipped at the Temple rather than the alternative pagan shrines built by their evil kings. The prophets Elijah and Elisha will continue the work of Ahijah and minister the warning words of the one true God to these people. 1 Kings 14:1ff, 17:1ff, 18:3-5, 19:10-11, 18.

God does not give up on His people, no matter how many turn away from Him. We can still be thankful for the love of God towards His people. Romans 11:1-5, 2 Timothy 2:12-13. In their darkest hour the believers within Israel flee and find refuge amongst their brethren in the south, and God keeps on speaking to them until the end through His prophets. Hosea 1:1, Amos 1:1, Micah 1:1.

1 KINGS 12:1-33

1 And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. **2** And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;) **3** That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, **4** Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. **5** And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed. **6** And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? **7** And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. **8** But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: **9** And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? **10** And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. **11** And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. **12** So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. **13** And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; **14** And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. **15** Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat. **16** So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. **17** But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. **18** Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. **19** So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. **20** And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. **21** And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. **22** But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, **23** Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, **24** Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD. **25** Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. **26** And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: **27** If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. **28** Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. **29** And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. **30** And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. **31** And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. **32** And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. **33** So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5.

The seeds of secession are already laid before the meeting at Shechem, for the Northern tribes have already recalled Jeroboam. It is almost as if they sensed that the new king Rehoboam was not the warlike and tough man that they sensed was needed in this crisis hour. They sought an alternative monarch who was a tough man and had a proven track record of success in warfare. None openly know of the prophetic word from Ahijah, but

given Jeroboam's exile, I suspect it was an "open secret", and many may have felt that he would be a better bet for the future than any son of the dissolute Solomon. 1 Kings 11:26-40.

All knew that Jeroboam had planned rebellion and had to flee to Egypt, and they knew exactly where to find him there. Rebellion is in the air! They knew that they didn't need a profligate who taxed them heavily while making millions in his trading ventures. They sought a tough king who could protect them against the threats on the borders that they all saw had built up in the last years of Solomon's reign. 1 Kings 11:23-25.

Solomon had given them magnificence and fortresses, but not the strength to man them with a sense of power and confidence. They all sought a strong man to lead them, and Rehoboam clearly understood that mood of the people for strength, but his spoilt upbringing amongst the women of the palace, without active service in the Armed Forces to toughen him up, had made him foolish. He did not understand the psychology of power and man management.

The message of the elders of the people to Rehoboam is clear. The meeting place at Shechem is patriarchal and significant spiritually. It was here that Jacob's sons slew the local men after the rape of Dinah. Genesis 34. It was also here that Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into Egypt. Genesis 37. It was also the place where evil murders were committed in the days of the Judges. Judges 9. In this historic place, associated with betrayal, the great meeting was held, where the Northern Tribes could gather and meet their new king, and speak their mind before they acknowledged him as their king.

Jeroboam is already the spokesman of the Northern Alliance of ten tribes. It is his presence as their leader which should have moved Rehoboam to ask the older men what to do about Jeroboam, but he ignores that question. Politically he has either to kill this man, or to make him a governor/adviser/councillor. Rehoboam has however no understanding of real politics, and this reflects badly upon Solomon, and is a possible clue that his death is sudden, rather than a slow death that would have given him time to instruct this foolish son of his.

Rehoboam is however over forty years old at this point, so should have picked up some wisdom from his father and his written works, but he has apparently not learned a thing! Rehoboam mistakes tough talking, and threatening words for strength of character, and so proves himself unworthy of the kingship. The two key phrases used by the northern peoples are to be noted carefully. They note that the taxation and other burdens placed by Solomon in his latter years were "grievous service", and a "heavy yoke". These words are as strong as they can be and indicate that Solomon's requirements by way of indentured service and taxation were excessive and oppressive.

The elders do not seek the removal of any legitimate burdens, for they understand that to have a "modern State" they needed to have adequate administration and strong Armed Forces to keep them safe. All they ask for is for the burden to be "lighter". If the burden is lighter; that is, reasonable and fair, then they will serve the new king. Their question indicates that they do not have the heart for the house of David that Rehoboam thinks they have. He cannot depend on the reputation of his grand-father to rule, he must show wisdom and strength to win their loyalty.

It is a reminder to us, that none of us can serve in any role, on the basis of the reputation of the person who went before us. We must win the loyalty of our team on the basis of our own wisdom and performance in the role as we take it over. Our first days in the role set the standards that we are going to follow, and our words and actions in the first days determine whether we will be successful, or will fail completely. When an alternative leader is giving the speeches of welcome and asking the initial questions, the pressure is really on us to perform with wisdom and strength of character quickly. Jeroboam is that "alternative king", and Rehoboam doesn't see the facts before him.

Verses 6 – 8. Rehoboam is not ready for this question, and asks for three days to consider the answer to their question. This is also baffling, and indicates a man who is unprepared for the exercise of power. When you take over any enterprise, after waiting in the wings for twenty years, you ought to have had a plan formulated. Rehoboam rides quietly in State, with his advisers and army from Jerusalem up to Shechem, and there was plenty of time on this ride to ask counsel of his advisers and formulate a speech to win over the Northern Tribes. His intelligence gathering organisation will have told him of Jeroboam's escape from Egypt and return to lead the Northern elders.

This is a time for immediate statesmanlike speeches and motivational leadership on his part, with a new fiscal policy, and most importantly, a "return to God" program. This man has no spiritual discernment, and little or no spiritual life and power. He has failed to call upon the prophet of God Ahijah, and no mention is made of his calling upon the High Priest and sacrificing before he heads for Shechem. The impression I am left with is of this fat headed middle aged king heading for Shechem in pomp, courtly magnificence, and ceremony, but without brains, spirituality, or clear strategic plan.

He seeks three days delay to gather information, and in doing this he has already lost the North, and is lucky that he doesn't lose the South as well. To require three days to seek for a policy that he should have clearly in his mind already means he hasn't got the character of a king to face a crisis with real wisdom. Solomon was tested early by questions, and at twenty one he showed wisdom that the men of his age looked for immediately in their kings. Rehoboam immediately proclaims by his words seeking time to think and consult, that he has no personal wisdom, nor confidence in his own ability. It means he is not an original thinker, has no personal strength, and is influenced by councillors.

Rezon of Syria waits to the North East in Damascus (1 Kings 11:23-25) and he is watching for weakness, and the northern elders now know that this new king is weak even before he speaks his answer. The older councillors of his

father know that Solomon had lost the plot towards the end of his reign, and that the burden of taxation and indentured service was too great to be sustainable for any longer. They know that a new fiscal policy is required to consolidate power and prepare to meet the real enemies to the north east in Syria, south east in Edom, and south in Egypt. This is the time to unify the people to prepare for war, not for more building projects and luxury spending.

The old men ask for “good words” to be spoken. This is a request for statesmanlike words, and their request betrays their assessment that arrogance drives this new king, not wisdom. He is a true narcissist; he believes he is entitled to expect anything he desires from his subjects and get it! He dismisses the old men with contempt.

Verses 9 – 11. His friends all grew up in the new palace with him. They have all had a privileged upbringing and are untried by the rigors of battle and life in the fields. They are “rich prats” and lack the wisdom or common sense to understand the words of the northern leaders, nor even understand what the presence in the northern delegation of the tough old soldier and governor Jeroboam means. These men are impressed by the power they falsely think they have here. They have technical authority as the courtiers, but without the Army, Tribal Elders, and people behind them, their power is irrelevant and empty. It is tough talking, and such words of threat and arrogance ought to be reserved for rebels about to be exterminated by a powerful army, not ever be used on ones own subjects.

In the Navy we had a humorous way of expressing such a bad leadership style. We would say, “The floggings will continue until morale improves!” This was sheer mockery, for anyone who adopts such a position in relationship to their own people will lose them and their position. The most famous Naval example of this was the Mutiny on the Bounty, where the arrogance of captain Bligh led his men to rebel against him. Why would you speak of chastising your own people with the stings of scorpions? Is it the threat of rebellion with Jeroboam there that drives Rehoboam to speak so foolishly? If this was indeed the point, he needed to separate Jeroboam from his support base, not make it even more secure by his own bad behaviour.

Verses 12 – 15. Once these arrogant and stupid words were uttered there was no going back, and there was no chance for recovery of the unity of the nation. Proverbs 10:11-12, 32, 13:10, 15:1-2, 16:18, 24:3-12, 25:8-14. When we read these proverbs and reflect upon them it is clear that this king did not learn anything from his father. Sadly his father’s bad example chasing many women was a more significant influence than his previous good words. This is a warning to us all, for our children pay heed to our deeds well ahead of our words, and many foolishly sinful parents have regretted this fact.

The arrogance and harshness of Rehoboam’s words were going to insult his northern people, and yet he didn’t see that this was the “to be expected” result. His complete lack of comprehension has been replicated many times through history. I have personally been called into major businesses who had called in expensive “consultants”, who then proceeded to totally alienate the staff, in one case to the point where the consultants were lucky to get out of the factory alive! My job was to settle the staff and get them back onto the right path. I was able to achieve this by hearing the staff concerns and then building trust from where they were. Rehoboam’s inability to do this led to the loss of his kingdom.

The writer records that the behaviour of Rehoboam was inexplicable except for the fact that he was totally unfit to rule, and that the Lord had known this from eternity past, and the prophecy of Ahijah had reflected that fact. Solomon’s sin has led to greater sin, and judgement has started to flow into the nation. Sadly it is only the beginning. This young man has no spiritual strength and does not walk with God at all. All would have been changed had he called the priesthood and the prophets, but he trusts his own wisdom, and he is deluded.

Verses 16 – 20. Rehoboam is left with Judah and Benjamin only, and the north separates out and follows Jeroboam, who has the military experience to call an army together and defend the secession with force of arms if necessary. Israel has been called to arms, and they express their rejection of the new king by stoning to death the tax collector sent to gather tribute monies. Why would Rehoboam ignore their words at Shechem and send a tax collector rather than an envoy to try to find peace? This man adds stupidity to his foolishness and arrogance.

Jeroboam received the offer of the crown of the northern tribes and he takes it, and so sees the prophecy of Ahijah fulfilled. At this point he needed to recall Ahijah and hear the words of the Lord again from him. The Lord has told him that he has been given the throne, and he now needs the Lord’s power and guidance to hold it. He has had the truth told bluntly to him and like Rehoboam he faces the choice; will he honour the Lord who gave the crown and so hold it, or will he follow his own arrogance and sinful nature and so lose it. This man will prove himself every bit as foolish an unbeliever as Rehoboam.

Verses 21 – 33. A new prophet rises, in Shemaiah, to warn King Rehoboam not to invade the north and start a civil war, for the Lord has given the north to Jeroboam due to Solomon’s and his own sin. It is a brave prophet who stands and calls the king to back away from war when he has already called up his army. His words are strong, and the phrase, “thus saith the Lord”, is said with the authority of the Lord, and never should be used in any other context. God’s message is that the division of the kingdom is, “from the Lord”. The men of Judah heard the words and I can only suspect that it was with very heavy hearts that they headed home, knowing their dumb king had lost them the entire north and East Bank of the Jordan.

Jeroboam loses no time in establishing a new capital, and to do this he would have had to gather in taxes and manpower, so I suspect the people suffered under his early years equally to those of the last years of Solomon. Rebels establishing themselves in power always tend to be harder on their people than those who they replaced. He establishes

his capital in Shechem, fortifies this town, and also rebuilds a fortress called Penueel, which was on the caravan road from the Gilead to the north and northeast. This was where the threat from Syria would come from and hit first; it was his early warning fortress that would give advance notice to his capital of attack from Rezon of Damascus. Judges 8:17, 9:49.

His first actions are sensible military ones, but the next are religious and betray his friendship with paganism. He “takes counsel” and builds pagan altars in Bethel and Dan. These are set up as alternatives to Jerusalem, for political purposes, but in complete violation of the Lord’s words to him. He didn’t need to fear that the people would leave him for the family of David, for they had rejected Rehoboam as an arrogant idiot, but he is ruled by his fears rather than the Lord’s words.

He develops an alternative religious system in these two northern towns and they become centres of idolatry and paganism, and so quickly the entire north is perverted into evil paths. He tries to break the hold of the Levites, who are still obligated to go to the Temple for their month service each year, by establishing a new sort of priesthood, and he does this by selecting from what we would call “low lifes”. This means he picked people who were no good for anything in society and were life’s losers, and made them priests. By doing this he ensured they owed him everything, but he also ensured that they would do anything for money and power, for desperate and “low life” type people will allow power and influence to go to their head quickly. This is exactly what occurs and very soon these “priests” are serving Baal and Ashtaroth and the other pagan deities.

He established a new festival time on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, which was the day of his coronation. He replaces the Feast of Tabernacles with his own coronation remembrance as their new harvest festival! The standard time for Tabernacles was the seventh month, and while the harvest was a little later in the northern regions, it was a change that God had not authorised, and it was the first step in the development of a new religion. His arrogance goes way beyond Rehoboam’s and his rebellion against the Word and Plan of God is complete. It only now waits for his judgement to arrive from the Lord.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Leadership training is a deliberate thing, and unless people learn how to lead they will fall into the traps of their Old Sin Nature centre of arrogance. Natural and character traits are vital starting points, but “teachability” is crucial to build upon basic character. Rehoboam is captivated by his own arrogance, and he works from the basis of that rather than seeing the true facts before him, and having an intelligent strategy to deal with the real challenges the nation faced. He has been impressed with his position and role, and not by the need for prayerful advanced consideration of the needs of the nation. It is always the right choice to pray before advancing into a new role, and always the right choice to get all the facts you can before you face your first question from the Lord’s people.
2. There are always Jeroboams about. Many men and women seek power and it goes to their head when they get it, even if they are God anointed to start with. This is the biggest challenge for leadership; to keep your eyes on the Lord and not be distracted by power and authority. Let us walk humbly before our God and so fulfil the Lord’s Plan for our life, not some hollow satanic alternative.
3. Satanic alternatives to the true spiritual faith have always existed from the first experience of man at Cain’s murder of Abel. Satanic religion appeals to the natural man, and we are called to oppose it and stand against all evil and sin. Recognise believer that the greatest enemy of truth is alternative religion! Let us proclaim the truth clearly and often, for it alone can keep men safe from evil and from the temptations of sin.

REFLECTION UPON OUR INNER ENEMY - THE OLD SIN NATURE

1. We are born with a nature, inherited from Adam, which is against God and prone to sin (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12).
2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race by physical birth (Psalm 51:5, 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).
3. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).
4. Names for the old sin nature:
 - a) Flesh – Galatians 5:16
 - b) Old Man – Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9
 - c) Carnal – Romans 7:14
 - d) Sin – Romans 5:12
 - e) Heart – Jeremiah 17:9
 - f) Member – Colossians 3:5.
5. The believer continues to have an old sin nature after salvation (1 John 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:1).
6. The believer under the control of the old sin nature is called carnal (Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
7. The old sin nature frustrates true production of the Christian life (Romans 7:15).

8. The old sin nature has two tendencies (Romans 6:6)
 - a) Area of weakness – pushes us towards lawlessness and sins (Hebrews 12:1)
 - b) Area of strength – pushes us towards asceticism and self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).
9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:56, Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
10. Victory over the old sin nature is achieved by considering your old life dead, surrendering to God, confessing sin and relying upon the filling of the Spirit (Romans 6:6,11, Colossians 3:9-10).

NOTES

CHAPTER 13**INTRODUCTION**

God does not leave himself without a witness, even when His people turn away and head full speed into idolatry, paganism and immorality. The path of Jeroboam was a path of political expediency rather than the path of spirituality and truth. He had received the kingdom by word of prophecy and the terms of the Lord's delivery of the ten tribes to him were clear; he was to obey the Lord his God and serve Him in spirit and in truth. If he did this his sons would sit upon the throne, but if he did not he would be judged and his family would cease to exist. 1 Kings 11:37-39.

The prophet of God is brave and clear in his message, but he is deceived by a devious old prophet from the northern tribes, and enticed to break his vow before the Lord, and so he dies. This may appear a strange chapter, and the judgement of the Lord upon the prophet unfair and a bit harsh, but do not judge too soon, for we will see that the danger that the prophet falls into is a danger that can destroy us all. Jeroboam's evil is open and obvious, but the old prophet's subtle evil is equally dangerous.

1 KINGS 13:1-34

1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. 3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 4 And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. 5 The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6 And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. 7 And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. 8 And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: 9 For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. 10 So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. 11 Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel; and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel: the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. 12 And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. 13 And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass: and he rode thereon, 14 And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak: and he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah? And he said, I am. 15 Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. 16 And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee in this place: 17 For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. 18 He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. 19 So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. 20 And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: 21 And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, 22 But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers. 23 And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. 24 And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. 25 And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. 26 And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. 27 And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled him. 28 And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. 29 And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and to bury him. 30 And he laid his carcase in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother! 31 And it came to pass, after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: 32 For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass. 33 After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. 34

And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. God has His called people at all times in history, and they will speak to His people when it is required. At times the prophets speak to total pagans, that they might be warned and possibly saved. Elijah and Elisha have this ministry in the north after this man, and Jonah heads to Nineveh, from local service here, to save the pagan population there. Large numbers of prophets are not required, but those that are called must be ready to speak the words of the Lord exactly as they are received by them.

To be a prophet is an incredible responsibility, and absolute obedience to the call of the Lord is required, without exception. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:15-22. The prophet places themselves in the Lord's hands, and must be absolutely clear about their message and be faithful to, and trust in, the Lord for their protection.

This man has a word from the Lord, and the Lord backs this word by a miracle of judgement upon Jeroboam. He pronounces a judgement upon the altar that will be fulfilled many years down the track at the hands of Josiah. 2 Kings 23:15-20. Even though this altar is judged here, it will be rebuilt within days and both the people of Israel and the people of Judah will follow after pagan gods that cannot hear them, or answer their prayers. Isaiah 40:18-21, 44:9-20, Jeremiah 11:12, 32:27-33.

The cry is directed to the altar, as if it is a living thing. It is a reminder to us that paganism is not a nebulous and inert belief system; it is an actively satanic operation backed by demonic forces which are behind all the gods. Leviticus 17:7, Deuteronomy 32:17, Isaiah 40:6-8, 1 Corinthians 10:20-21. The judgement will fall after a considerable time, but that is because of the grace and mercy of God, not because of any weakness or hesitation on God's part.

The Lord waits for man to repent and will wait a long time for each generation and only judge when there is no further hope for change. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, 2 Peter 3:9. Jeroboam's response to the prophet is to order his immediate execution. As he lifts his hand to deliver the order to kill the prophet his hand shrivels and freezes into a distorted shape. He cannot move his hand at all. Simultaneously the altar itself breaks in half and the ashes slide from the top into the cracks that have opened up in it. The crowd around will have fallen silent at this point!

Verses 6 – 10. The king very quickly requests healing from the prophet of the Lord. Unfortunately his request is from exactly the same self centred source as the pagan Pharaoh's was before Moses. He seeks healing so that he might continue his paganism the next day. Exodus 8-11. If you believe I am unfair on Jeroboam or on Pharaoh, just look at the attitude and behaviours of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and at Jeroboam's later life and work, and you will see that all through history some people want healing, just so that they can continue in their sins for longer!

God is gracious and honours his prophet, and the king is healed. Jeroboam has now received two ministrations of grace in his life (a prophetic word and now healing), and yet he will not repent of his evil and return to the Lord. This would have involved peace with Judah and yearly visits to Jerusalem, but he will not do it. God wants this man to face the full truth and forsake his paganism. This will lead to him making peace between the two kingdoms and will ensure the national worship remains unified, even if the politicians are not. This was possible, but this man doesn't want to politically risk it, and he doesn't want holiness, even though the Lord has now dealt with him twice in grace. This man prefers his choices of paganism and pleasure, sadly just as Solomon had in his later life.

The king then invites the prophet home with him to eat and drink and feast in celebration of the healing. It seems very rude of the prophet to refuse, but there are good reasons for so doing. This king wants to spiritually and possibly morally compromise this man by the feast and drinking that will accompany it. To eat, drink and be merry with pagans is a dangerous thing, for they can get you into a relaxed place where truth and morality is compromised. We are not to seek the company of evil men, nor "taste their dainties". Proverbs 23:1-3, 1 Corinthians 5:9-11.

It may also be that the king will later try to kill the prophet when he thinks about the events of this day. It is important for the prophet to head for Judah again and not stop until he reaches safety. There is a time to talk and relax, and a time to run; this is a time to run. He is also promised a "reward", but no believer must receive reward for the Lord's work from any unbeliever. To do so confuses the message of evangelism, for the unbeliever must know that no money given can ever make them acceptable to the Lord, only their repentance and acceptance of what the Lord has given them can deliver them.

Verses 11 – 19. The prophet of God has been given specific instructions to head straight home and not delay anywhere. He will unfortunately relax under a tree on his way back. Now once again people may say I am being a little hard here, and my old life as a Naval Officer is starting to show, but there is a reason the Lord told him to move quickly back and relax only when he returned to Judah. This man does not understand the depth or the subtlety of the evil that is at the heart of Israel. This is a place that is too dangerous to rest under trees within; he must push on with all his strength and power and eat and drink and relax only when he gets home. God calls us to be strong and fit for service, not need to rest under trees half way through a job. Let us be as fit as we can be.

The old prophet is specifically not referred to as a "prophet of God". He may have served in such a capacity in the past but he is not the Lord's man now, if ever he was. He is not at the altar built by the king on the day of the new sacrifice

and so he missed the drama of the confrontation between the king and the prophet of God. He is excited by what he hears however, and seeks to meet this man who clearly is the servant of the living God.

Now this man's attitude is a reminder that people have many motives to draw close to the prophets and preachers of God. Be wary believer, for there are men and women around like this "old prophet" who want their photo taken with you, but whose heart is far from you, and will later use the photo to prove you support their viewpoints. He seeks blessing and he possibly seeks the joy of spiritual fellowship with a godly prophet again after many years away from the Lord. Before he dies he possibly simply wants to know the fellowship of God again. Now I am being generous to this man, for he may simply be a servant of Satan who seeks this man's destruction. The writer leaves us guessing, but gives us enough information to know this man is to be avoided, and his words are not to be trusted.

He quickly orders his sons to saddle his ass that he might pursue after the prophet and have fellowship with him. We are not told his true motivation, and must guess at them by his later actions. He quickly pursues the prophet down the road his sons have seen the prophet walk back to Judah along. He is an old man and close to death, so he cannot walk, but he rides as fast as he can. He overtakes the prophet of God who is, counter to orders, resting under an oak tree. Now I am not being harsh and tough, I am being realistic here, for he needs to keep moving with all his strength and energy and escape this now paganised land. There is no time to rest.

He is easily found by the old prophet and deceived by him. In verse sixteen the prophet of God tells the old man his orders from the Lord, but the old man lies to him to deceive him into fellowshiping with him at his home. This tells me that the prophet of God cannot have gone far down the road, as it is an easy journey back. He has been told not to head back towards Shechem, for here the king lives and there is great danger and evil, but he is deceived by the old man and returns with him.

Prophets are in three categories; fools who imagine things, satanic lying prophets, and God's servants. The majority throughout all history have always been in the first two categories. Believers are to beware of false prophets. Isaiah 9:15, Jeremiah 5:10-14, 30-31, 23:13-29, 32, Ezekiel 13:1-23. The true prophet is however very foolish on a number of counts and he will pay with his life for his foolishness.

Remember the words of Paul, and even if an angel tells you a thing counter to the clear instructions of the Word of God you are to ignore the angel! Romans 16:18, 2 Corinthians 11:3-15, Galatians 1:6-9. Believers who do not know the Word of God are easily deceived, and like the prophet here, winning great power confrontations do not guarantee future success if you are not absolutely obedient to the revealed Word of God. Proverbs 29:18, Hosea 4:6.

The prophet of God heads back into Shechem and so breaks the clearly received command of the Lord. Even though he doesn't drink wine he still breaks his fast and eats in the house of a liar. Whatever this old prophet's spiritual position in the past he is a cunning liar now, and his desire is just to be close to this true prophet in life, and later he will desire to be close to him in death. He gets more than he bargained for however.

Verses 20 – 24. The old man must have been shocked by this, but the Lord actually speaks through him directly at this point, exactly as he had done years before through Balaam. Numbers 22-25. The old man cannot help his words; the truth tumbles out and the true prophet is convicted by the old liar, who now is giving the truth. The true prophet is told that he is to die the "Sin Unto Death".

There is no mention of repentance, although it may have occurred, but the men do finish their meal, although I suspect it will be a silent one. If the old man had been a man of honour he would have accompanied the true prophet back to Judah and died with him if necessary, but he doesn't. We find out below that this man has a number of animals and so could have accompanied this prophet had he really been a brother in the Lord. The old man gives him one of his own asses, perhaps hoping that he can out ride the judgement by riding quickly. Numbers 22:22-30.

The true prophet rides sadly away and is met quite quickly on the journey by an Asiatic Lion which takes him off the ass with one bound and kills him. Then however a strange thing happens; the lion does not eat the man or the ass, and the ass does not run away. It is a sign of the Lord's judgement, just as the strange behaviour of other lions many years later is the sign of God's protection. Daniel 6:16-27.

Verses 25 – 32. The closeness of the prophet to Shechem is now seen in that the news of the man's death and the lion standing by his body gets back to the city quickly. The old false prophet (for now I believe the evidence is clearly in that he is a fake prophet) now moves quickly after a hypocritical speech, recorded in verse 26, that while correct is disgraceful coming from the man who lied and deceived the true prophet to his death.

Sit with these words believer, and especially if you are a pastor, for you will hear these words from falsely pious unbelievers when they see a true man or woman of God fall into sin. The fastest condemnation of the sins of God's people will come from self-righteous unbelievers. This old man condemns himself by his words as a pious fraud. He is brave in recovery of the body, but it is for his own purposes.

His actions speak of his desire to have this godly man buried beside him as a sort of eternal "good luck charm". Many seek the company of believers because they feel safer with them, both in life and in death, and yet in death we all stand up separately before the Lord who judges all unbelievers on the basis of their works. Revelation 20:11-15.

The burial of the true prophet is carried out with pious hypocrisy. All the talk of “my brother”, when this man lied to him is sickening! These words are weasel words, and if you serve the Lord faithfully as a pastor teacher of the Truth you will hear them drip from the lips of evil men often. Do not trust the lying words of men who claim friendship and lie to you. Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ did not trust unbelieving men or carnal men. John 2:25-26.

This old fake does recognise that the words of God are true but we are left wondering about his actual status as a believer. Is he a make believer, a carnal believer, or an unbeliever? It doesn't really matter, for he is the sort of man you must spot in ministry quickly and avoid like the plague he is.

Verse 33. Just in case you believed I was too harsh on Jeroboam we now have the results of hearing the prophetic words at Shechem; he ignores them all after a few days. Evil men will let the words of God cool in their ears and then act exactly as they always intended to act, but they are now without excuse before the Lord. It is a hard job for a preacher or prophet of the Lord, but at times you will be asked to speak to those who will ignore your words and head off into evil paths.

Do not despair of the work, for it is still God's work, even though there is no fruit of righteousness in the lives of the hearers. Isaiah 29:13, Jeremiah 1:18-19, Ezekiel 3:3-6, Amos 7:12-16. These verses were my own call to ministry on 19 February 1976. Your task, like my own and many of God's servants through the ages, is to ensure these people are without excuse when they stand before the Lord of all the heavens and the earth.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Evil is subtle at times. The old prophet is not referred to as the “old prophet of God”, and while, like Balaam, he is used by God to speak through, he is neither spiritual nor truthful. Deception is the devil's main tool to side track believers from their true path in life. Let us be alert to the wiles of the devil and trust no man or woman that isn't certified by the presence in their life of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Let us remember that paganism is not a philosophy, it is a person, and it is alive and its malice does not rest. While we have more power within us than the Devil has outside us, 1 John 4:4, that power is only operational as we are walking in the Holy Spirit.

2. People will lie about spiritual things to win renown or pretend to a spirituality they do not possess. Satanic people are like their master – liars from beginning to end. The Fruit of the life, not the fruit of the lips, is the means of assessing people. We must be “fruit inspectors” in this life or we will be deceived by the lies of Satan's people. We must be daily armoured by the Holy Spirit, and quite consciously put on the armour of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:1-11.

This means consciously by prayer accept and “put on” the various pieces of our spiritual armour, accepting the Lord's work and provision for us, and rejoicing in His ownership over us. Colossians 3:8-14. It means walking through the day in prayer and holding fast to the words we receive.

3. Separation from unbelievers and carnal believers is a difficult thing in this present world, for it may seriously restrict our social circle at times. It is vital however if we want to remain spiritually safe and focused on the task the Lord has given us. We are not here to please ourselves, but the one who gave Himself for us. John 8:29, Romans 8:5-18, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2, Hebrews 11:6.

4. Let us give the truth at all times and at all times give the Lord's truth. We are called that men might be without excuse before the Lord of glory. Let us serve the Lord our God with faithful focused energy and be ready at all times to deliver what the Holy Spirit encourages us to deliver.

REFLECTION UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF “SEPARATION”

1. Believers are instructed to be separated from habitually carnal believers. (1 Corinthians 5:10, 11)
2. Separation is ordered from apostate religious organisations. (2 Corinthians 6:17)
3. Separation is commanded from unbelievers where scripture is compromised by the relationship or marriage, business partners. (2 Corinthians 6:14 ff)
4. Separation is commanded from the human viewpoint. (Romans 12:2, Romans 16:17, 18)
5. Separation is commanded from pseudo spirituality. (Romans 16:17, 18)
6. Separation is commanded from those who seek pleasure in fast living – pursuit of parties, immoral situations. (1 Peter 4:4)
7. Separation is commanded from other believers who reject Bible doctrine. (2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15)

CHAPTER 14**INTRODUCTION**

Devious people cannot help themselves, and they will take all means to achieve their goals, even when a straight forward approach would bear the best fruit. One of the signs of a personality disordered person is that they do bizarre things when straight forward things would be easier and more effective. It is almost as if these people cannot help themselves; they lie when the truth would be best, and deceive when a direct approach would bring results. They do this because they will not accept, follow and honour the truth, nor follow good advice from others. They "double think" everyone, believing all others are as devious as they are, and so they fail to heed good advice, for they doubt all good people.

Jeroboam and his queen are people in this category; they are persistent and deliberate pagans. Jeroboam knows he has directly opposed the Lord, and that the idolatrous path he has chosen is cursed. He also knows that the gods he is serving are inferior to the true God of Israel, and yet he persists in serving idols when the truth is before him in the sun every morning and the stars every evening! It is easy to remain in paganism when you are resting in a palace and everything looks fine, and you can ignore the truth, but God sends illness to remind him he needs truth, and yet he will persist in error.

Both kings of the divided kingdom are men who have failed to follow the Lord their God, and have refused to whole heartedly serve the Lord and obey the Mosaic Law. 2 Chronicles 12:1-3. They both have received warnings, and in Jeroboam's case, the direct words of God through His prophet. He now tries to obtain the prophet's blessing for his son, even though he has failed to follow the prophet's words to him. 1 Kings 11:38-39.

The sin of both these kings is pride; for they will not bow their knee permanently to the Lord, who is indeed God, and they will not worship and serve the one who gave them their life and their kingdoms, and who will give them blessing if only they will serve Him alone. The Lord waits for five years before moving finally against Rehoboam and the kingdom of Judah, but then the great kingdom of Solomon falls to Egypt in the fourth cycle of national discipline.

1 KINGS 14:1-31

1 At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. 2 And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. 3 And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child. 4 And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age. 5 And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman. 6 And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. 7 Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, 8 And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes; 9 But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: 10 Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. 11 Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. 12 Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. 13 And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. 14 Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? Even now. 15 For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. 16 And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. 17 And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; 18 And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet. 19 And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 20 And the days which Jeroboam reigned were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead. 21 And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. 22 And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. 23 For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. 24 And there were also sodomites in the land: and they

did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 25 And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: 26 And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 27 And king Rehoboam made in their stead silver shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house. 28 And it was so, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber. 29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 30 And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. 31 And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Jeroboam's son fell seriously ill. The boy may be of any age, but he is not a baby given the comments of the prophet in verse 13, which indicate that he did worship the Lord in some way that the Lord approved of. Now even though I am running ahead of the narrative here, given that observation in verse 13, why was he allowed to die? Could this young man have brought Israel back from the brink of idolatry, or was he better to die young and saved, than old and degenerate?

Events would indicate that it was better for this boy, or young man, to die young rather than grow older and suffer what the nation will suffer. There are things we cannot know this side of eternity, but in the sickness and death of this young person we are reminded that this life is not all that there is, and that seeing an early death as a tragedy at all times may not be true at all.

The king knows that he has no credit with the true prophet at all for he has treated the words of the Lord from him with absolute contempt. He has chosen the path of idolatry, and yet he does not seek the healing touch of the pagan prophets of his own fake shrines, for he knows they are useless. Why do men cling to a belief system that fails them in their hour of need?

The only good thing we can say of this evil king is that he was close to his wife, and both of them love their son, and his wife is prepared to travel far to the south to the home of the true prophet of the Lord, Ahijah in Shiloh. She is also prepared to pretend she is another person to try to trick the true prophet into blessing and healing her son. They believe that God's servants are able to be deceived, as they have deceived themselves in their paganism. Such is the state that pagans get themselves into. The old prophet is now blind and so they believe that he will be able to be fooled by the heavily disguised wife of the king who comes bearing the gift of food that a poor person would bring to him for his help.

Verses 5 – 6. The pagans are easily defeated by the Lord's direct intervention with his servant Ahijah. The old prophet does not need eyes to see the truth, for the Lord tells him the truth. Psalms 2:1-5, 139:1-4, Proverbs 21:30. The Lord very specifically tells the prophet what he is to say, for the prophet speaks as the very oracle of God to this pagan queen. This is not God's last word to this family, and it will not be their last opportunity to repent and be restored to some form of blessing, for the next king of Judah will rebuke this king upon the very battlefield they fight upon. 2 Chronicles 13:4-20.

Great grace and mercy is shown to Jeroboam and his main wife, for they are also sons and daughters of Abraham, but they will persist in their paganism until the very end. The prophet is not to make the words kind or soft, for the message of the Lord is coming to those who have chosen the path of rejection of truth and have persisted in that path for many years. They are to hear the whole truth from the prophet and nothing but the truth, and it will not be pleasant. Ezekiel 2:3-8, Daniel 5:17-30.

Verses 7 – 9. God is the one who lifts any man or woman up to rule over others, and what the Lord has given, He is able to take away. 1 Peter 5:5-9. We are lifted up in grace and mercy, and we are cast down in judgement if we fail to uphold the standards of truth the Lord requires of us. God's "deal" with Jeroboam was clearly made when he was told he had been given the northern tribes for a kingdom. 1 Kings 11:29-39. All this man had to do was worship the one true God and not encourage or permit the worship of the pagan gods of the nations around about.

The standard for him was the standard of King David. He could have failed as David failed, but he had to repent and recover as David had. God was not demanding perfection from this man, but honesty and devotion, even through his human failings. If he repented, even that this point he would have been blessed.

He had made false gods that were no good to him, and yet he was still worshipping them, and he had cast the truth "behind his back". This is a powerful phrase of apostasy towards God and is an example of the total rejection by this man of the truth of God, and his hatred of relationship with God. He has actively put all thought of God behind him, until the point when his son was ill, then he faces the truth that his gods are worthless, but he will still not openly come and bow before the Lord God.

Verses 10 – 16. The entire household of Jeroboam will be cast away as a result of his evil, and all his sons will be lost to him, and none will survive to sit upon his throne after him. His family will be dealt with as if it is excrement. These words are the worst possible words to use of a family; none will survive the terrible calamity that is coming, and none will follow Jeroboam to sit permanently upon his throne. The catastrophe that is coming will affect the entire nation

that follows after him. They will be eaten by the dogs and the fowls of the air, and mercilessly killed by their enemies till none are left. The son they have hoped would live and rule will die, but at least he will be buried, but all others of this household of evil will die and be unburied.

This was the most shocking thing to happen to a Jewish person and these words must have struck the queen like a hammer. Do not feel sorrow for this woman however, for she has persisted in her paganism until this day, and even after these words she will not repent and seek the face of God, nor will she and her husband destroy the paganism they have followed. She is told exactly when the boy will die, and he does.

A new king will be raised up in Israel and he will destroy all the remnant of the house of Jeroboam so that none are left. All of Israel will however suffer for their paganism and be “shaken like a reed” in the winds of judgement that will blow. The point that the Lord makes to the queen is that this boy could not have brought the nation back from the brink of judgement, for they have gone too far and will not repent. The prophecy is given against them that they as a nation will be “taken beyond the river” in captivity. Deuteronomy 28:1-63.

This is a prophecy that will take another 200 years to be fulfilled completely when the Assyrians will come and take them away into captivity. Their sin is their idolatry, and it is a fatal sin for any people, for to turn from the truth to a satanic lie is to reject God and select the destiny of Satan. To select idolatry instead of the true God is to choose the path of death instead of the path of life. Matthew 7:13ff. Do not accuse God of being unfair, for these people have 200 years to repent, and those who do are able to flee south and be saved within Judah. There is hope for the believing remnant of Israel however and many move south through the years to worship the true God of Israel and so they will not be lost when the northern kingdom finally falls to the Assyrians in 720BC. 2 Chronicles 11:13-17.

Verses 17 – 20. Jeroboam’s wife doesn’t hesitate long with the prophet of God, but leaves straight away. We are not told whether she walked in peace, calm, anger, sadness, or fear, for she was not a believer and her attitudes and thoughts are of no concern to the writer. This is an aspect of this history that you will see as you go through this book, and the next, and the book of 2 Chronicles. It is the believers that the writers are concerned about, for they alone have an eternal destiny. The thoughts of the damned are of no consequence, for they have left the path of life and hope and their despair is simply the wages of their sins, and they cannot complain about them, for they have earned them all by their rejection of the truth.

We tend to waste too much energy upon the sadness and suffering of the lost in our own day, because they are the people that the pagan film makers make their heroes, and so we are educated by the entertainment industry to feel sorrow for people who have chosen the path of sorrow. Let us learn from our writer and put aside all time wasting sympathy for those who as adults have made the choices that destroy them. Let us give them the truth, as the old prophet does, but give them no further thought once they have rejected it. Our debt to them is paid in our proclamation of the truth. Romans 1:14-32.

The old prophet is proven a true man of God, for the very moment the queen’s feet touch her thresh hold the son dies, just as he had predicted. The young prince is mourned by all the people of Israel, and this bears witness to his being more than just the crown prince, but a godly young man also. The writer now makes a reference to the Chronicles of the kings as the place where more information is recorded about this man Jeroboam. He reigns twenty two years and dies an unbeliever, and is replaced by his son Nadab, although this doomed prince will rule only a few years until he and all his father’s house is destroyed.

Now our books of Chronicles are not the ones referred to for they have very little about the kings of the Northern Kingdom in them at all. 2 Chronicles 11:1-4, 13:1-20. It is this last passage that records that Rehoboam’s son fought against him and disabled his army and rebuked him by a powerful speech. It is in verse 20 that we also have recorded that Jeroboam was “struck by the Lord and he died”. We are not told any more, but the indication is that he dies under judgement, as Ahijah had prophesied.

Verses 21 – 24. Rehoboam dies even younger than his father Solomon, and he followed his father with his excess in wives also; with eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and fathering 28 sons and 60 daughters. All this proves nothing of value about his virility, just his stupidity; for like his father he was distracted from the true task of government and faith-rest life, and so failed the nation. His mother was from the royal house of the defeated pagan nation of the Ammonites, which is another reason his sons will not be the ones whose descendent bears the Messiah in David’s line. Luke 3:31-32.

Under his distracted kingship his people returned to the pagan ways of their ancestors in the days of the Judges. His “good” government only lasted three years, and then he slipped into neglect of spiritual matters. 2 Chronicles 11:17, 12:1-4. The people rebuilt the “high places” and worshipped there again rather than in the Temple at Jerusalem. This man did not set the right example, but practised a polite and formal type of religion, and even though he attended the Temple for the three annual festivals, he was not spiritual. His life example led his people to believe that genuine faith was not important, and so the apostasy grew through his seventeen years.

Even the evils of sodomy grew in his days, and the paganism associated with this and its Canaanite religions (Baal and Asteroth/Astarte), grew and prospered. This man didn’t actively practise evil religions, but his lack of opposition to them, allowed them to grow in influence and rot the heart out of the nation. It is not enough just to do righteousness, (and this

man falls short even of that standard), we must actively oppose evil if we have a position of leadership in the church or land.

The “high places” were places of paganism under the Canaanites and even though the hill top altars had been used by Samuel and others in the days of the Judges, they had nearly always led to declining spirituality and increased paganism over time. The “groves” were straight pagan shrines to the Canaanite gods Baal and his consort Ashtaroth/Astarte and the pillars erected to these gods were the centres of sexualised worship that led to the evils mentioned here. All aspects of idolatry are forbidden to God’s people at all times. Exodus 20:1-6.

Verses 25 – 31. After five years of moral and political inaction and declining standards of faith in the nation the Lord acted in judgement, and the Egyptian Army arrived and conquered the entire land. Jerusalem fell to Pharaoh and he demanded and took all the gold and silver plate that Solomon had laid aside. Rehoboam should not have been surrounded by gold and silver, he should have turned it all into troops and equipment! All this wealth was lost and possibly many valuable items from the Temple itself.

Did the ark disappear at this time as legend records? Remember it is a legend that this is when the Ark is seized; it is not a biblical observation. We have no final answer to this, but Pharaoh allows Rehoboam to continue to rule and the Temple to operate, and that indicates that he would have left behind what the religion needed to operate. I believe that the golden altar and also the ark probably stayed in Jerusalem, but the Temple had been stripped of much of its gold and other “treasures” (2 Chronicles 12:9).

Rehoboam’s pride is seen in that he makes replicas of the golden shields taken so they shine like gold, but are only brass. It is this preoccupation with appearance that has led to the down fall of the kingdom, although the writer of the Chronicles does record that Rehoboam repented of his evils after this disaster and was restored to faith in God and had some blessing in his last years and passed his kingdom on to a son Abijam/Abijah, who rebuilt the nation’s military strength, and makes one good spiritual speech, although over all his performance is not good at all. 2 Chronicles 11:1-23, 12:1-16.

For those who want to study the activities behind the scenes around this time, the Pharaoh who invades Judah is referred to in the literature as Shishak, Seseonchis, Sheshonk, or Sheshenk. He was the first pharaoh of the revived twenty second (referred to as the Bubastitic) dynasty of Egypt. In his temple in Karnak there are the depictions of the captured Jewish prisoners from this invasion of Judah. Go on line and you will discover the extra-biblical evidence for the events of this chapter.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us toughen up in our mental attitude towards the lost who have rejected the truth and hate those who stand for it. We have the solemn obligation before the Lord to speak to all who will hear the truth about God, but once they have set their hearts to walk away from the truth, let us let them go after their falsehoods, and not waste any time or energy upon them. No pastor ought to waste energy weeping over those who have deliberately rejected the truth once it has been faithfully presented to them. We leave them with a prayer for their later salvation, and we shake the very dust of their dwelling off our feet. Matthew 10:11-18, John 16:8-11, Acts 13:51.

2. Failure to stand against the evils of paganism allows such things to grow amongst any people. Whilst we have no mandate in our secular nations to call our nations to follow God’s standards, we must call all people who will hear our words to follow the truth. In our preaching we must carefully identify evil and name it as such, so that those who hear our words are without excuse for tolerance of the evils that destroy peoples. Tolerance of the evils of paganism, including homosexuality, will lead to disaster for any nation that allows such things to prosper within their borders.

3. Rehoboam shows that it is never too late to repent, but that the losses may be significant if repentance is delayed. He is restored after Shishak’s invasion, but he has lost all the gold his father laid aside for him and his nation. Delay in obedience and building spiritual power through a daily walk with God has a price to pay. For this foolish king it was billions of dollars in lost money and many lost people. His distraction with women and pride cost him nearly everything. Let us tell these stories to our people that they may not follow the example of foolish men.

NOTES

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

The reign of Abijam/Abijah over Judah was short, but one important incident occurs that is not mentioned in our account, but is covered in the Chronicles record, and that is the doctrine filled speech of the king of Judah to the armies of Israel before a great defeat. It is evidence that even carnal men can, at times of extreme need, understand spiritual truth, because their lives depend upon it. The writer rushes on through the years to cover one of the better kings in Solomon's line, King Asa, who rules for 41 years. This man's heart is after the Lord, but even he fails to trust the Lord for his deliverance at one key point and hires the services of the Syrians to deal with Israel. Let us keep the time line clear in our minds and see the names of the power hungry men who fight over the spoils of royalty (all dates have a plus or minus of 5 years) :

975 BC	Rehoboam (Judah)	Jeroboam (Israel)
971	Shishak plunders Jerusalem	
957	Abijam (Judah)	
955	Asa rules (Judah)	
953		Nadab Rules (Israel)
952		Baasha slaughters the house of Jeroboam
930 – 925		Ela, Simri, Tibni, Omri all fight for power.

Of all these men named, only one, Asa, is referred to by the scripture writer, as a "good man" before the Lord. Both nations are spiritually on very fragile ground and few realise the truth about God and their need as a nation to walk closely with their Lord. All of these kings rule in around half a century and the wars between Israel and Judah cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Due to the sins of the people there is peace through this period for only ten years. 2 Chronicles 14:1. Apostasy has a heavy price to pay for its evil. All this evil occurs within the life time of a person and all of it is the result of sin.

1 KINGS 15:1-34

1 Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat reigned Abijam over Judah. **2** Three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. **3** And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. **4** Nevertheless for David's sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: **5** Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. **6** And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. **7** Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. **8** And Abijam slept with his fathers; and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. **9** And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah. **10** And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. **11** And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father. **12** And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. **13** And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. **14** But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days. **15** And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himself had dedicated, into the house of the LORD, silver, and gold, and vessels. **16** And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. **17** And Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. **18** Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Benhadad, the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, **19** There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. **20** So Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelbethmaachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. **21** And it came to pass, when Baasha heard thereof, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. **22** Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none was exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. **23** The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. **24** And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in

the city of David his father: and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead. 25 And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. 26 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin. 27 And Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. 28 Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. 29 And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: 30 Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Israel to anger. 31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 32 And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah began Baasha the son of Ahijah to reign over all Israel in Tirzah, twenty and four years. 34 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 8. King Abijam/Abijah was the great-grand-son of Absalom through Absalom's grand-daughter Maachah. 2 Chronicles 11:21. Like Absalom, pride rules this man's heart, and although he does some good things on one battlefield, he falls short of the standard of God for rulership. Our writer records that he lived and ruled for three years only to ensure he established his son on the throne with a chance for success for him, and that all this was the grace of God towards David, not any deserving actions on Abijam's part.

Take time to read his speech, as the writer of the Chronicles account records it. 2 Chronicles 13:4ff. This was clearly a prepared and written speech, recorded for the great occasion and read aloud by the king in the natural amphitheatre of the battlefield. It is a fanciful speech, especially the part about referring to his own father as "young and tender hearted", when he was forty one when he took over as king, and was a fool. This man may be around twenty years old when his father begins to rule, and is probably in his late forties or early fifties when he rules and dies.

His words in the speech about the rights of the house of David and the primacy of Jerusalem are the key parts of this speech as far as the priestly author of Chronicles is concerned. Especially note verse 8, for this is the heart of it, and in this verse we see that the idolatry of the northern kingdom meant they stood before the army of Judah with several golden calf statues as their "lucky charms". They had fully returned to the paganism that Aaron had been tempted to follow by the people of the Exodus and that God had judged then, and would judge again on this battlefield. Exodus 32:1-35.

Abijam makes it clear that the false gods of the north will not save them from anything, and will guarantee judgement upon them. In verse 12 he calls upon the northern Israelites to refuse to fight against their brethren and against the priests of the true God who stand before the army of Judah and whose shofars will blow as testimony against the gods of the northerners. This is a reminder that the priesthood had joined the southern kingdom after the split and few Levites stayed north of the border. 2 Chronicles 11:13-15.

While Abijam is speaking Jeroboam sends part of his army around the back of the army of Judah and tries to ambush them from behind. The army of Judah cries aloud to the Lord, and the Levites blow upon their shofars, and they surge forward and defeat the far larger Israelite army. God gives them victory. The writer of Chronicles records that it was the Lord alone who gave Judah the victory that day, and who maintained the military superiority of Judah over Israel. 2 Chronicles 13:16, 18, 20.

That writer also notes that this king followed his stupid father with multiple wives. He marries fourteen women and fathers 22 sons and 16 daughters. Verses 21 -22. Each generation has fewer wives, and this man has no concubines, but they are all still well away from the Lord's plan for marriage and the family, and their multiple wives and children produce intrigues that undermine the stability of the kingdom. Most are killed by their successors, and none "get away with" this rank disobedience to the clear command of the Lord.

Verses 9 – 14. The reference to Maachah, the grand-daughter of Absalom again has created some debate amongst commentators, for she is referred to above as Abijam's mother, and so cannot be Asa's. This is a reminder that daughter and grand-daughter is written of as if the same relationship, and mother and grand-mother are likewise combined. This queen Maachah retained the title of "queen mother" through the early years of her grand-son's reign, until her own idolatry leads to her being deposed.

Asa does what is "right" before the Lord overall, and one of his first acts is to deal with the Canaanite religious cult of sodomy and eliminate them by execution, as the Law of Moses directed. This is a thorough process and all found are killed. Leviticus 18:22-30, 20:1-6, 13, Deuteronomy 23:17.

We now are told why king Abijam was deposed by the Lord, for he had actually made idols and erected them himself, probably with his mother's approval or support. Asa immediately takes away all these idols and destroys them, and even targets the grove of his grand-mother for destruction and burns her idol in the Kidron valley. She is deposed as queen and loses all dignity in the royal household as a result of her idolatry. The message gets out clearly, that the new king will follow the Lord God alone and idolatry of any sort will not be tolerated.

He did not follow through totally however and allowed the high places to remain as local places of worship in addition to the Temple. His motivation was likely good here, and possibly political, allowing the people to continue to use altars that were dedicated to the Lord God of Israel, and some of these may have gone back to the time of the conquest. Even though this was understandable, it was wrong, and these altars would become places where compromises were made and paganism would then re-enter the land.

He was however completely loyal to the Lord all his days, and that is what the Lord requires of us. 2 Timothy 4:1-8. Even though he loved and served the Lord all his days, he was a frail man like us all, and he failed several important times, and the end of his life was not pleasant as a result. These times are noted by the Chronicler and are detailed below.

Verses 15 – 17. Asa had less than ten years initial peace in his entire reign of 41 years, and was after that time in a constant state of tension or war with Baasha, king of Israel, who did all he could to stop his citizens visiting the Temple in Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 13:23. Asa dedicated great wealth to the Temple through his reign and replenished the treasury after his grand-father's loss of the gold and silver to Egypt, and then used it to pay for Syrian help against Israel.

Our author in the Kings account leaves out most of Asa's reign and describes now an event, which is likely from his 36th year of reigning. There may be a copyist error here, as Baasha only reigns 24 years, and begins in the third year of Asa, and so it cannot be in Asa's thirty sixth year that Baasha launches his invasion to seize Ramah, as Baasha had been dead for nineteen years by then. The seizure of the key border town of Ramah by Baasha is probably in Asa's 26th year, which is Baasha's twenty third year. His death a year later and the subsequent coups and counter coups would then be expected after such defeats as he suffers at Syrian and Judean hands. Baasha initially has surprise and success and fortifies this town in order to stop his own people from going south to visit the Temple on the feast days.

As noted above in 2 Chronicles 16:1 the writer there records that this action occurs in the 36th year of Asa's long reign, but I suspect this should read his 26th year. Asa had however seriously spent money on the Armed Forces in his early years and fortified places that would give him some warning against Israelite or other incursions. 2 Chronicles 14:1-7. The writer of the Chronicles account gives us far more detail than our author in Kings, and records that well before this incursion by Baasha, 15 years before, in his eleventh year, Asa had used his Armed Forces against a Cushite/Ethiopian invader called Zerah, who invaded with a large army. This man may have been a pharaoh of the 22nd dynasty, but that is unclear from our texts.

Asa met this challenge in spirituality, and with the support of the prophet of the Lord, Azariah, defeated the superior army that was against him. His own army was significant, with 300 "elephs", or companies, from Judah, and 280 "elephs" from Benjamin. This word for company came to mean a thousand by the Greek period (3rd century BC) but it is unwise to be dogmatic on its significance here at this time. He had however led a large army of tough men who gained victory as David had done before him.

After this great victory over Zerah he launched a more powerful anti-idolatry campaign and kept the nation mainly true to the Lord for all his reign. 2 Chronicles 14:9-15. After this significant victory he also held a great victory feast in Jerusalem, and the entire population dedicated themselves to following the Lord their God again with renewed passion and fidelity. 2 Chronicles 15. It is a full 15 years from this great victory before the seizure of Ramah by Baasha.

Verses 18 – 21. Baasha attacks 15 years after the invasion of Zerah has been turned away by Judah's large army. Given the extent of the victory recorded in 2 Chronicles 14:12-15, Baasha was taking a great risk in this attack, and there are two likely explanations for it, and Asa's response to it. The army of Judah has inflicted a serious defeat upon the Ethiopian Army 15 years before, but it may have been at considerable cost in lives to their own army.

In hand to hand combat an army could lose half its men. It may be that the army had serious casualties and although it will have replenished its ranks, the veterans of that great battle may be gone by this time, and that Baasha took the opportunity of their temporary weakness and attacked. It may also be that he launched his attack because of King Asa's health problems, which mean he is unwilling or unable to lead his army into the field to war. There is a story behind this, but we are not told it by either of our authors.

We know that Asa sought the Lord's will and guidance to fight the Ethiopian Army, but he appears to fail to do so 15 years later, before he arranges for the Syrians to attack northern Israel. Why does he do this? It may be his army is exhausted, depleted, that he was ill, or that he didn't want to kill his fellow Jews, but it is a dangerous thing to pay for others to fight your battles for you. He depletes the treasury to pay the king of Damascus to do his fighting. The plan works, and Baasha must leave off the fortifying of Ramah and head home in haste to his palace at Tirzah. He is dead and there is chaos in Israel for the next ten years.

Although the plan works, it was wrong, for it ignored what God could do to defend His people, and it depended upon pagans for help, which no believer is ever to do. The Seer (prophet with the gift of fore-sight) Hanani came to Asa later and convicted him of his sin in relation to this buying of Ben-Hadad for the defeat of Baasha. It is a strong rebuke to his lack of faith in that situation. 2 Chronicles 16:7-10. Asa got really angry with the Seer and jailed him for a time because of his rebuke. This rage went to others as well, who he persecuted for unspecified reasons, and this tells us that the foot problems he had may have been a sign of a deeper malady that affected his mood and general health and fitness also.

He fails to trust the Lord in his sickness, just as he had in the northern invasion, and trusted his doctors who couldn't help him. The disease got worse and worse, and may have killed him in the end.

Verses 22 – 24. The call up of every man without exemption indicates to me that he was possibly still short of men 15 years after the battle with the Ethiopians, and required every man he could get to dismantle the fortress at Ramah. Or it may be that he simply was taking no chances with either Israel or Syria, and so had every man ready for battle. This was wise in the circumstances. With the stones and timber from that place he fortifies Geba and Mizpeh further to the north.

By assembling every man he could he could both threaten the north with invasion and so force them to stay behind walls, and also build the two new fortresses quickly. It is a testimony to his good organisation that he was able to do this quickly and efficiently. The writer records that he was indeed a man who built up the "might" (Armed Forces) of the nation of Judah and served well as the king. He was not a distracted monarch with his harem, but an organiser and a prayer-warrior king, but he does not end well and although he is praised as a good king, his last years have a shadow of increasing ill health over them.

In his last years he had a disease of the feet, and given the history of heart failure in the family, this man may have been suffering from poor peripheral circulation, which is often a complication of heart disease, and possibly from a form of diabetes. The author of Chronicles records that the disease in his feet got so bad that it was life threatening. This sounds like circulation problems and/or diabetes leading to gangrene in the toes. Today toes are amputated, but in that day the untreated condition would lead to uncontrolled gangrene and an awful death.

He failed to call upon the Lord for healing or help and trusted his doctors. While it is bone fide to seek medical attention, it is always wrong to do so without prayer for healing. The Lord owns us, as our Saviour, and that means all our problems are His problems and are to be taken to Him, even if at times healing will not occur. Acts 5:15-16, 19:12, 28:8-9, 2 Timothy 4:20, James 5:14-15. Refer Acts 28:7-10 where there is a full discussion of healing.

Verses 25 – 34. While there is stability in the south under Asa for 41 years there is great political turmoil in the north. Coup and counter coup occurs in the later years of Asa's long reign, and most involve the slaughter of the entire previous ruling house. Jeroboams entire household is exterminated by a particularly nasty replacement of his son, by Baasha, who himself is killed, and then after twenty four years, four rulers are murdered within ten years, all by equally evil men. All these men are Israelites, and it is a warning to us of just how bad God's people can get when they walk away from Him.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God's prophets must be ready to tell the truth even if the kings they speak to jail them for their trouble. Hanani is jailed and others are persecuted by this good king Asa, and he continues to be torn between his spiritual service of the Lord and his anger outbursts at God's men at times. Accepting unpleasant correction is a requirement for all leadership. We must be able to be corrected by godly men and women or we are a danger to the ministry. Let us ensure we are open to the conviction of the Word of the Lord.

2. We are the Lord's and we are to take all our concerns to the Lord in prayer and that means our sicknesses, relationship troubles, and financial troubles. Indeed all things are to be taken before the Lord in prayer. We are never to trust men, but the Lord, and take advice and help from men only as the Lord gives us peace so to do. We are the Lords, and so let us live that way.

3. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. This fact has been at the heart of real politics since the beginning of time. We must be ready for the assaults of evil upon us, and ready to defend our freedom and our nation at all times. Relaxation and over confidence is always the prelude to disaster. Let us encourage our Armed Forces and ensure our nations are strong, and so evil men are deterred from launching attacks upon us.

REFLECTION OF THE TOPIC OF "DYING GRACE"

1. We are all here upon the earth as in a "strange country"; we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, and are not meant to be too comfortable here. Philippians 3:12-17, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11.

2. Death is the strangest thing we confront on this earth; the weirdness of being here one minute, alive, alert and warm, then a second later, dead, cooling and inert. Death is meant to appear strange to us, for it is the evidence before us that we are not permanent inhabitants here, but simply playing out a part as we pass through. This is not a place we are meant to get attached to. Refer Death.

3. The death of believers is a precious thing to the God who has given his life to save us from the judgement of sin and death. 1 Samuel 26:21, 2 Kings 1:13-14, Psalms 49:8, 72:14, 116:15, 1 Peter 1:7, 2:4. Refer Grace.

4. We all must die, but that is not the end. 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:13. The mature believers facing death see through it, to the other side where they meet with the Lord face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.

5. Dying grace is provided to all believers who are looking to their Lord as they die, for his perfect provision for each of us from eternity past has everything we need provided in advance of our life, let alone our death itself. There are no surprises to God, and all things we face have provision for them there to be claimed by faith. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Peter 2:9, Jude 24-25.

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

God's men are required to be ready to speak to all they are called to approach; that means to believer, or unbeliever, friends or enemies. Hanani had to face King Asa and rebuke him about his use of the pagan Syrians to kill Israelites, and he gets thrown in jail as a result of that, and now his son is called to speak to Baasha, the king of the northern land of Israel. It may be that Baasha would see the son in light of the father's rebuke to his enemy Asa, and so hear him, in case the rebuke of Asa will be followed up by blessing for Israel, but we are not told of the son, Jehu's, reception.

We also don't have a time line in this chapter to tell whether the father and son operate in the same time period, but it is likely that they do, for Hanani operates just after the invasion by the Syrians, and Baasha dies within a year of that time, so the prophet's son Jehu, must be speaking around this same time, just a little after his father's imprisonment. It may be that his call to the office comes after his father's imprisonment. It is a reminder that the gift of prophet is the gift of revelation to warn and recall to righteousness, and is often accompanied with suffering by the prophet, and nearly always with danger.

Prophetic gifts are not inherited with our first natural birth, but with our second spiritual birth. We note through history however that spiritual discernment and giftings can run in families, as the children follow their parents in godliness, and the job of every believing parent is to bring their children up so that the Holy Spirit can have His way with them. This father and son prophetic team have hard messages to give in very hard times and they show courage and determination to be obedient to the words of God.

Notice also in this chapter and subsequent ones, that the dates for the Israelite kings are given in terms of the kings of David's line in Judah. God's line is the southern line, and so the pagans of the north get their reference points from the south. At times these southern kings are every bit as evil as their northern cousins, but there are some that walk with the Lord, and they descend from David, albeit through Solomon, whereas the north are tough pagan power brokers to a man. It is in this chapter that we are introduced to one of the most well known of the pagan kings of the north; Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

1 KINGS 16:1-34

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, **2** Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; **3** Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. **4** Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat. **5** Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? **6** So Baasha slept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah: and Elah his son reigned in his stead. **7** And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the LORD against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him. **8** In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years. **9** And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of his house in Tirzah. **10** And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead. **11** And it came to pass, when he began to reign, as soon as he sat on his throne, that he slew all the house of Baasha: he left him not one that pisseth against a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends. **12** Thus did Zimri destroy all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake against Baasha by Jehu the prophet. **13** For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. **14** Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? **15** In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. **16** And the people that were encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp. **17** And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. **18** And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died. **19** For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel to sin. **20** Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? **21** Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. **22** But the people that

followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. 23 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24 And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria. 25 But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he shewed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 28 So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned in his stead. 29 And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. 30 And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32 And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. 34 In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. Bravery and personal courage are at times required of God's servants; and we all need to be ready to confront the enemies of the truth with the truth of God whenever the Lord calls us to act. Jehu acts with the same courage his father showed, even though he is possibly at this time in jail as a result. To deliver this message Jehu was possibly to die himself, for he is announcing doom to Baasha, who has just had to withdraw from Ramah in disgrace, and has faced the loss of many towns in the north to the Syrian armies. Beaten men will often be very angry, and will seek the life of those they can kill, especially if their real enemies are beyond their power for revenge.

Baasha is a multiple murderer, who has killed all the men, women, and children of Jeroboam's family, but Jehu is brave, and gives the message that is required. Baasha is reminded that he had victory over the house of Jeroboam because Jeroboam was judged for his evil, but he has followed the evils of Jeroboam, and so he will be judged for the same reasons. The same ruthlessness with which he eliminated Jeroboam's household will be used by his killer on his own household. As he has sown, so will he reap in his own family; what he has done to others will be done to his own. Proverbs 22:8, Hosea 8:6-8, Galatians 6:7-9.

Verses 4 – 7. The curse upon him is identical to the curse upon Jeroboam, for his sins are the same, and that is the point that the prophet makes. Baasha's actions against the prophet are not recorded here. So many of the prophets were killed giving their messages, and we simply don't know if this man survived this commission, for he drops off the pages of history here, as does his equally brave father. Hebrews 11:35-40.

This king not only did evil, he surpassed the evils of Jeroboam and worked more, and he had started by the murder of all Jeroboam's blood relatives, so he started with a blood thirsty massacre of men, women, and children, and for that his blood is now required also. The phrase of the Mosaic Law, "his blood shall be upon his own head", sums up the concept of divine justice. As men sow, so they reap. None can accuse the Lord of being unfair, for the Lord gives them exactly what they ask for, even down to eternity without Him as their God. Revelation 20:10-15.

God is absolutely just and fair in his dealings with men, and they reap exactly what they have sown, so that they cannot accuse God of any sin when they stand before Him finally. Leviticus 20:9-16, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 9:27, 10:27, James 2:13, Revelation 20:11-15.

Verses 8 – 14. Baasha dies under the Sin Unto Death, or under God's direct and obvious judgement, and his son Elah starts his reign but he is as dissolute as his father, and completely ignores the words of the prophets of God. These verses read like a movie script for a "B Grade" action movie, and yet they are real and sadly they record the evils of the sons of Abraham. They had every spiritual benefit and turned after satanic evils. It is a reminder that we can all go down hill on a godly ancestry.

This man is a new king and ought to be establishing himself in righteousness, but he is partying and drinking to the point of drunkenness. His general in charge of half the chariot forces sets up a coup d'état, and when the king is drunk in his palace kills him. This is during the time when his army was conducting an actual siege of a Philistine city, and so the king's place was at the siege anyway; he ought not to have been drinking in his palace. His drunkenness is fatal, and his general Zimri takes power in the palace, but the Army has other ideas, and appoints their commander to lead them, for they doubt that Zimri is any better than Elah had been.

In the meantime Zimri executes all men who were related to the house of Baasha, and all his friends and allies. At least he doesn't kill women and children, as Baasha had done, but he is still extremely ruthless. The writer makes it clear that Baasha dies for his sins, and all the male family members are not to be pitied for their deaths, for they were all party to Baasha's evils and willing participants in them.

Verses 15 – 20. Zimri reigns only for seven days before the Army Commander Omri launches his attack upon the palace. The siege of the Philistine city of Gibbethon is raised and they get off the hook, but Tirzeh, the city of the king is now besieged. The Army does not have any respect for Zimri apparently, and the fact that he was in charge of half the chariot forces and yet was in the palace rather than on the battlefield may be an indication of something about his lack of courage and leadership abilities.

The Army selects their own field commander as a better king and marches to deal with the man they all now see as a traitor and murderer. The Army moves fast, and within seven days they have raised the siege at Gibbethon, marched to and broken through the wall at Tirzeh, and have breached the Palace defences. Zimri takes the coward's way out and rather than fight, he burns the palace down around his ears in true pagan style. The writer has no doubts about the eternal destiny of this man Zimri; and that he dies in his evil and faces eternal judgement.

Verses 21 – 22. The divisions in the north are far worse than they initially appear to be. The legacy of self centred, and pleasure seeking leadership is that many observe the ease of their power, and so they lust after it also. When fools rule, greater fools believe they can seize and wield the same power. When a power vacuum arises in a badly run business, church, or nation, there will be a scramble for that power, and the most lust filled hunters for it will be the most unfitted to wield it. Be sure that those who seek power most thoroughly are most completely unable to wield any power at all without being destroyed by it!

The north falls into two factions, with some of the people selecting another "wannabe" dictator, Tibni, the son of Ginath, as their king, while half follow Omri. There is civil war for a time, and Omri's side steadily gains power and destroys the other side. Tibni is killed and Omri reigns as king. Those who like godless evolution as a theory can see the evidence for their theory of the so called "survival of the fittest" in the northern kingdom of Israel, but it is an evil thing, for men without God are indeed like the wild animals, except they are worse! As Jesus notes, "By their fruits you shall know them". Matthew 7:13ff.

Pause and reflect on my last observation, for it is meant to be provocative! The northern kingdom's evils do not prove that the "survival of the fittest" works out well in nature or in the realm of man. Is Omri more "fit" than Zimri, Tibni, Elah, Baasha, or Jerobaom? Are they not all unfit to rule, and the chaos that eventuates from their evil reigns is the evidence that the strongest is not the best to rule at all! Left to man's own devices, without reference to God, the evidence of history is that the most unfit to wield power ends up wielding it, and they tend to destroy everything in their self centeredness.

Hitler is a good case of unbridled Darwinism, as is Stalin, Idi Amin of Uganda, or Saddam Hussein and others presently executing their own people to retain power. Each of these men proves that the so called "survival of the fittest" is nothing other than a satanic lie, for these "winners" destroyed all they built over time. Without God's Plan and purpose man is a "winner" of nothing and a loser of everything!

Verses 23 – 28. Omri becomes famous in the north as the builder of Samaria, and in these verses we have the story of its establishment and the origin of its name. It will be the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel from the sixth year of Omri through until it is destroyed by the Assyrians in 720BC. Here we find that the hill is named after the previous owner of it, Shemer, and that two talents of gold were paid for the land upon which the great new city is to be built and fortified. All the rest of his reign is spent building this city and making it a visible challenge to Jerusalem across the hills.

Omri followed the previous kings in all their evils and even went further than they did. He favoured the paganism of his neighbours before the worship of the one true God of Israel. He ignored the Word of God, and despised the Mosaic Law, and he certainly would not make his peace with Jerusalem and worship at the Temple there. He brought his son up to admire the culture of the pagans, and his son would seek his wife from amongst these people rather than from the believers in the one true God. That son was the infamous Ahab, and yet for all his evil, God shows him great grace and sends the greatest of the early prophets, Elijah, to witness to him to the truth, and urge him to turn from evil back to the truth.

Verses 29 – 34. Ahab went further still into the evils of the northern kingdom and did more than the previous kings, and he rules for 22 years in such a state of evil. He entered into the worship of Baal, and marries the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon, who was the high priest of Baal for the entire area. It may be that Ahab met Jezebel on a visit to worship at her father's great pagan shrine. Baal worship was fertility worship and involved all forms of sex as part of the rituals.

This was a man given over to sexual sin, and he joins himself to a woman who is also given over to all forms of sexual perversion and the use of sexual power to achieve her desires. It is a marriage made in hell itself. Ahab sets up a full Baal temple in Samaria, and establishes a grove of sacred trees on an adjacent hill and has his sexually depraved rituals there with his equally depraved wife.

Ahab does more to provoke the Lord to anger than any king before him, and yet the Lord will try to reach this man. In his religious devotion to evil there is none who surpasses this man other than the man named Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament. We know this, for Saul himself, (by then called Paul), records that he was indeed the worst of religious sinners ever to walk. Acts 8:3, 22:4, 26:11, Romans 7:14-25, 1 Timothy 1:15.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us set our hearts and minds to be like Jehu and Hanani and speak the truth to all who come to us for a word from the Lord. We are called to serve the Lord in spirit and in truth and so let us serve Him by speaking the truth to all men.
2. As a man sows, so shall he reap; in this life and in eternity. Often we hear the moans of those who don't want this principle to be true, but it always has been true, and there is no escape from the consequences of our actions except through confession and restoration to the Lord. Let us deal with our sins before their consequences overwhelm us, and let us resist the tendency to self pity, for the Lord has given us fair warning of the need to face this reality. Let us also resist the tendency to sentimentality towards those who have fully and finally rejected the truth of God, for they have chosen their own path, and the Lord gives all men that right.
3. If God cares for Ahab and sends Elijah to him to give the truth, then we must know for sure that there are no men to be considered too evil to hear the Gospel message. If God could save Saul of Tarsus, then He can save any evil man, even the most religiously self righteous. Let us pray for those who hate us and the message of truth. Matthew 5:44. Even if men hate and persecute the truth, we are still to pray for them and speak to them if they will hear. If they will not, then with a farewell prayer for their souls we are to shake their dust from our feet and move on without a backward glance. Their blood is upon their own head once we have met our solemn obligation before the Lord and told them the truth.

Notes

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

We are introduced in this chapter to Elijah, the greatest of the early prophets, and a man that later prophets would look back to as the one who summed up what it was to be a prophet of the living God. Moses and Elijah stand out as the great men of the Old Testament period, and are the two that appear with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, summing up, as they do, the Law and the Prophets in their persons. This man mentors prophetic leadership.

It is Elijah whose spirit and nature is exuded by John the Baptist, and the Lord identifies John with Elijah. Elijah was associated by the last prophet Malachi as the messenger to come to announce the arrival of Messiah. Malachi 4:4-6, Matthew 11:12-14. Such was the expectation of the arrival of Elijah in Jesus own day that many thought he may be Elijah. Matthew 16:14.

It may be that these two great men are the yet future "two witnesses" of Revelation 11:4ff. Both these great prophets, like Moses before them, were attested by amazing signs and wonders that arrested the attention of the people, and proved that these men were indeed the servants of the living God, and that God was superior to the demonic forces behind the pagan gods.

All through Israel's history there were those with the gift of prophecy, and they operated in various places, singly and as part of religious groupings, referred to as the "school of the prophets" (a Bible College), 1 Samuel 19:24, or as a social-society type group called "the sons of the prophets", 2 Kings 2:3-5, 4:38. The key point about both references is that these were men and women who valued the Word of God and studied it daily. As students of the Word of the Living God they were able to be used at times to speak to God's people, and a few obtained the office of prophet from the Lord to speak to kings.

The office of prophet was rare, and still is very rare, but the gift of prophet was given by the Holy Spirit whenever it was needed. Such people did not add to scripture, for they were judged upon the basis of their faithfulness to it, but they provided the words of the Lord directly into a situation. Read again the account of those who served the Lord in the past in these offices and reflect upon how many suffered, and how many were rejected by their own people, and even gave

their lives in the service of the truth. Acts 7:35-40, 51-53, Hebrews 11:32-40. The prophet remains a called role and courage, tenacity to the task and the truth, and faithfulness to death is required of all called prophets. These two men here mentor the virtues of genuine leadership, for they spiritually lead their nation when the politicians fail.

1 KINGS 17:1-24

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. **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 Cherith, that is before Jordan. **4** And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. **5** So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. **6** And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. **7** And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. **8** And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, **9** Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering 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. **12** And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. **13** And Elijah 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. **14** For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. **15** And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. **16** And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah. **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 Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? **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. **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** And 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 the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23** And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. **24** And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Elijah is immediately before us without any explanation of where he has come from or his early life and preparation for this ministry. It is a reminder to us all now in the 21st century, and one that he will need to have later himself, that no matter how bad things get, the Lord can still train and prepare His called people for service in the worst times and places. All we are told of this man is that he emerges from the Gilead hills and enters the court of Ahab and prophecies in God’s name to him. He speaks in the name of the “Lord God of Israel”, and Elijah underlines the fact that God alone truly “lives”, and that the gods of the pagans are nothings, and behind them are the demons that are inferior created beings. 1 John 4:4.

The message to Ahab is specific and blunt; there will be a drought and resulting famine, and Elijah alone is able to stop the disaster by his word of command. Having delivered the word he immediately leaves the palace, and then God’s next word comes to him, as to the direction he is to take from the palace. Ahab does not immediately try to kill him, possibly because he hopes that Elijah is wrong, and possibly also because his own priests of Baal will give counter prophecies to encourage the king. Within a few months of drought however Ahab will be hunting for Elijah so he needs to have a secure hiding place. God’s specific direction provides that for him.

The test for legitimacy for any prophet is that he/she speaks absolute truth and his/her words are testable and verifiable by later events. What Elijah has said is genuine prophecy, and it will be verified by events, and as a result all of Ahab’s men will be searching for this man. What a prophet says must come to pass or he is no prophet. Deuteronomy 13:1-11, 18:10-22. Those who called the people away from worship of the one true God were to be executed immediately, and no-one was to be called a prophet who did not speak the truth at all times they spoke. Mockery or death was to be the lot of the fake prophet.

These clear rules for the prophets of Israel give us further insight into the “schools of the prophets”, for some today have argued that these “schools” were where they practised prophecy on each other. In light of Moses words that observation is nonsense. No-one was ever to “practise” prophecy, they were to saturate themselves in the study of God’s Word, and the Lord would come upon those He selected and give them prophetic words, but any time that occurred the words would be absolutely and fully true, and would be verified by later events.

To speak falsely, wasn't to, "just get it wrong that time", as some have argued today, it was to be condemned to instant death by stoning! Prophetic gifts are not to be coveted, nor practised by foolish people, for they carry with them great responsibility and serious consequences. From the facts of scripture the "school of the prophets" was a bible college where an older and proven prophet was teaching the Word of God and the potential prophets were learning the rules under which they would operate later if called by the Lord to speak.

God's instructions regarding Elijah keeping himself safe through the waiting time were specific as he walks away from Ahab's palace. He is to head east towards one of the ravines down which streams flow into the Jordan River, and he knew from God's words exactly where to go, but we don't know where he went today. The brook Cherith is unknown today, and while there are good guesses, we cannot know where the exact place is he was told to go.

This was a man who had clearly been to this place a lot, and it was a special place for him. It was a location that was a good hiding place, as he has to disappear for a couple of months, or Ahab will kill him. So just the fact that this brook is a hidden place we know a lot about Elijah as a man. Today he would probably be a member of a church tramping club, and he was clearly a man who did draw aside at times, and go into the wilderness for times of prayer and contemplation with the Lord.

This is a place known by Elijah and by God, and God can tell him to go there, and he knows the exact site. Having received this specific revelation, he goes to the spot and settles in there. He is obedient to the Lord, and this is a theme that the writer will draw attention to throughout this chapter. Proverbs 3:1-8. To be mightily used of the Lord we need absolute and learned obedience to the Word over time, through many testing circumstances.

Verses 5 – 7. He is going to have interesting "room service" while he is there by the brook. The water will be from the brook, and he will be provided with bread and meat for cooking by birds, as the Exodus generation is provided with manna. Exodus 16:31-36. It is a test of obedience and of faith. He must head for the brook Cherith, well away from people, and trust that the Lord will do exactly what He has promised, for he has no way of providing food for himself in such a remote and inhospitable location for any extended period of time. Numbers 11:23.

He will be fed there by unclean birds; birds that could not be used for food by Israelites, and whose presence rendered all things unclean around them. Leviticus 11:13-19. God is preparing this man for what will happen next by using the ravens. Elijah is going to have to learn the lesson that what God has made is not unclean when God sets that creature aside for His service. He is being prepared to serve the Lord to speak to the unclean house of Ahab.

He is going to learn this in the realm of nature with the ravens, and also in the realm of man. He is going to be sent to a Gentile house for his next hiding place. Acts 10:10-16, 27-29. He is many months in the ravine by the brook, and as the drought deepens, he sees the brook steadily dry up to the point where there is no water left in it at all. God is silent until that point, and only when the brook dries up does the Lord guide him to the next place he is to go for a hiding place. The Lord is teaching Elijah, and instructing us also, in the ways He guides us through this life. Many of the principles of Guidance are clearly illustrated by this experience by the brook.

Elijah must firstly be totally and immediately obedient to the command of the Lord, and go to the place in the ravine that he knows from previous prayer retreats, and there he is to wait by the brook for the ravens to arrive to feed him. That first day of his arrival he will camp by the brook and wait prayerfully, and it is not until the evening that the birds arrive and bring food. It is only then that he knows for sure that he has heard the Lord correctly.

Daily he must apply faith and trust in the Lord's provisions, and as he sees the brook dry up daily more and more, he must continue to pray for the Lord's guidance and not move until he is instructed specifically where to go. To flee to the wrong place is to give himself to the enemy and be killed. God wants us to walk with Him, not rush off in a blind panic ahead of Him. Often the true servant of God is called to wait by their brook Cherith, and study, write, pray and wait for the Lord's next orders.

Verses 8 – 10. Like Peter, many centuries later, in Acts 10, he is ordered to go to the house of the enemy; the house of a Gentile. In Elijah's case he is told to go to a town of the nation of Sidon; the very place that the evil queen Jezebel came from, and from where all her satanic power comes. From a military strategy point of view the advice is brilliant, for the safest place to hide is the place where the enemy is least likely to look for you, but in this day, when local dialects and accents were so specific that people could spot where you were from by your dress and pronunciation, it was an incredible risk to head for an enemy town. Once again the Lord is specific. He is to head for a named town and there he will "find" a widow who is prepared to help him, for she is a believer in God, and the Lord has spoken to her in advance.

Elijah is obedient once more, and heads for the coast to the north of Israel. He must travel through Ahab's land to achieve this and there will be great stories to hear in heaven about how he avoids capture through this time. It is many days journey to Zarephath, and we are not told how much food he had either. He most likely will have had to take from the food the ravens brought on the last day. He must trust the Lord for protection as he walks past Ahab's guards, trust the Lord for water on the way, and for enough food to get to his destination.

He arrives without food or water, so once again the Lord's provision has been just enough, with nothing over. As he arrives at the pagan town of Zarephath he sees a lone woman gathering sticks by the city gate. It was forbidden for any stranger to drink from a strange city's well and so he must ask for water from a citizen. God has arranged for this woman

to be at the gate this very day, and it is the last day of her life as far as she is concerned. The Lord cuts things finely does he not! This is the lesson for us all as we serve the lord, that He will provide, but he is the Lord of the eleventh hour and prayer is to be maintained all through the waiting time.

Verses 11 – 14. Elijah asks for water, and the woman heads off to get that, and as she walks to do this for him, he calls after her and asks for a small meal of any sort to go with the water. He steps out in faith with this request, for this town is also caught in the grip of the drought and resulting famine. The woman turns around and tells him of her plight. She has enough wholemeal flour and oil to make one small piece of pita bread, and her plan this day is to cook that bread, and for her son and her to share their last meal before their death.

This woman is starving and she and her son have been rationing their food for many weeks now, and have come to their last day. Elijah is asking her to trust him (and the Lord) and give him her last meal! Elijah's message to her is a message that demands faith, and an action that most would find hard to do. She is to trust him, and prepare the food and serve Elijah, and she will then see a great miracle over the months and years to come.

We are not told when the Lord gave Elijah the message about the oil and grain, but he has no hesitation in making the promise from the Lord he does to the woman. Elijah's promise from the Lord is that the grains of cereal and the bottle of oil will never run out, that daily they will renew themselves and that if she gives away her last food, God will provide for her until the famine ends. She must not try to bargain with the Lord and ask for the miracle first, for she must express her faith first!

I had the great privilege of growing up in a church in Blockhouse Bay in Auckland, New Zealand, with one of the great China Inland Mission (now OMF) missionaries, Hayden Mellsop. This very miracle of Elijah happened to him in China over many months in the late 1930s. Many Chinese refugees were caught in the mission compound when the Japanese Army took over the area. The foreigners and the Chinese believers were all locked securely inside and none could leave or enter. There was only one barrel of rice for over a hundred people and so there was not enough food for more than a few days.

Every day however the missionaries went to the barrel and drew out the rice they needed, and month after month there was always enough there to feed the multitude that were trapped in the compound. When the Japanese Army saw that they were not starving these people they relaxed their guard on them and allowed them out to buy food again. Our God is still a God who meets the needs of His people who trust in Him alone. Romans 4:16-25, 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16-18.

Verses 15 – 16. This woman expresses her faith and obeys Elijah's request, trusting that the Lord will indeed deliver her and her son in the months and years to come. As a starving woman, with a dying child, both afflicted by the famine, she prepares her last meal and gives it to the prophet. To smell food cooking while you are starving, and then give that last meal to another, is a supreme test of faith, and this woman meets the test. Jesus will visit this same area many centuries later and find another woman of similar faith. Matthew 15:21-28.

To step out in faith means just that, to step out and do something. Belief alone saves no-one, for the belief/faith that saves is never alone, for when faith is genuine it always expresses itself in an action, even if that action is a prayer or affirmation. Habakkuk 2:3-4, Romans 1:16-17, Galatians 3:11-14, Hebrews 10:38 – 11:2, James 2:14-26.

Faith begins with cognition (thinking and believing) but it expresses itself always in action. Faith without action is not biblical faith! All the dying thief on the cross could do was speak, and initially he spoke and abused the Lord with his co-offender, but later he repents aloud and affirms his belief in the Lord for all to hear. Matthew 27:38, 44, Mark 15:27-28, Luke 23:39-43. This evidence of his faith is what the Lord draws attention to.

Verses 17 – 24. The widow affirmed her great faith by cooking a meal for Elijah first and then going back to her then replenished barrel and oil container, and finding that the words of the prophet were indeed true, and she and her son were able to eat all they needed. Things are calm and stable for some time and Elijah is safe with this woman and her son. He is in hiding here, but all appears to be well for them, then the boy suddenly gets very sick and after a short time he dies. The famine may have taken a toll upon the boy, and he may have been sick before Elijah arrives, for he is not out gathering sticks with his mother when Elijah arrives, which may be a clue to his ill health. The writer makes it clear that he has died, "there is no breath in him".

The widow's words to Elijah give us a clue that this woman's life has not been always on the righteous path of the true God. She sees the boy's death as a punishment for her past life and its sins, and she rebukes Elijah as the Lord's prophet for allowing this judgement to fall after bringing her false hope that the days of judgment were over. Elijah feels the rebuke deeply, for he too questions God over the death of this boy, for he sees that he has brought hope to this house and this house has given him safety and hope, and now it appears to be cruelly snatched away.

It is not wrong to question the Lord at times; it is all too human. The challenge with our questions is to take them to the Lord, whose character is securely good and just. 1 Peter 5:5-10. Elijah takes his questions to the Lord, and expresses his faith in the CHARACTER OF GOD to the widow, and asks her to trust him with the body of her son. He carries the boy upstairs to his room and lays him out on the bed and prays earnestly to the Lord for the boy's life to return to him. He is likely praying beside the bed, and he stretches himself over the boy's lifeless body three times as he prays.

Don't try to see mouth to mouth resuscitation here, for this is a miraculous raising of this boy from the dead as a result of believing prayer. The boy revives and Elijah takes him down to his mother again alive. She affirms that now she really believes he is the man of God whose every word can be trusted. This is a strange thing to say given that she has expressed faith daily for possibly many months in the use of the barrel of grain and the container of oil. It reminds us that faith needs to grow and deepen, and that from simple things we need to grow our faith to larger challenges, and that as we grow spiritually the Lord will stretch our faith! Isaiah 54:2-4.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us walk in the fear of the Lord regarding claiming gifts that we do not have. To claim the gift of prophecy is a very serious thing. It is a rare gift and one that holds great accountability from the Lord for its false use. Let us walk with humility in this world and not make fools of our selves, nor bring the name of the Lord into disrepute by our actions.

2. Elijah by the Brook Cherith teaches us the importance of the daily "faith-rest walk" with the Lord. We are to be obedient, responsive to the Lord's commands, and trusting in His provision for us. Each and every day we are called to "wait upon the Lord" for further instructions, knowing that He will guide us to the next step on our life's journey, but only when His time arrives for it to be taken. The Lord's guidance is precise, and we will meet the right people and hear the right things at exactly the right moment; we must be absolutely obedient to achieve what the Lord wants!

3. Let us walk in faith with our Lord, daily trusting in His provisions for us. Let us cast off our fears and put on faith each day, trusting that the One who went to the Cross for us will deliver us in our time of affliction now. Let us remember and affirm the truth about biblical faith, and not teach the "easy believism" that has destroyed many in the church in America. Faith that does not work out in a godly life is no faith at all.

It is a disgrace to the church in America when pop stars and presidents affirm their faith and yet their lives affirm a pagan belief system being worked out on a daily basis! Let us rebuke the lie that says that saying "Jesus is the lord" is enough for salvation, for the devil himself can say that and he knows it is true! His demons know this truth and they tremble! God's people are called to do a lot more than just tremble! James 2:19.

REFLECTION UPON BELIEVER'S SUFFERING

1. Ultimately, all suffering is a result of the sin of Adam.

2. God is sovereign and allows even undeserved suffering to come upon the world for a reason (Romans 8:28)

- a) To bring people to a point of helplessness where they call out to Him
- b) To test and develop faith, so bringing glory to Himself.

3. There will be no suffering for believers in eternity (Revelation 21:4).

4. Unbelievers will suffer forever in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:12-15).

5. Suffering can be caused by:

- a) Discipline for your own sins
- b) The effect of the sins of others on you – gossip, war, crime
- c) Self-induced suffering as a result of your own actions – e.g. sickness from smoking, poverty from poor stewardship
- d) The sovereign will of God – health, weather.

6. Premise of Suffering:

- a) All suffering is designed for blessing in the Christian walk (1 Peter 1:7, 8, 4:14)
- b) Even discipline is designed to restore fellowship (Hebrews 12:6)
- c) Suffering follows the principle of grace (Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

7. Purpose of Christian Suffering:

- a) To receive discipline for carnality or backsliding (Psalm 38)
- b) To glorify God (Job 1:8-12, Luke 15:20, 21)
- c) To illustrate doctrine (Book of Hosea)
- d) To learn obedience (Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:8)
- e) To keep down pride (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- f) To develop faith (1 Peter 1:7, 8)
- g) To witness for Christ (2 Corinthians 13:4)
- h) To demonstrate the power of God (2 Corinthians 11:24-33, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- i) To manifest the fruit of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:8-11)
- j) To help others who suffer (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

k) From indirect action – because other believers get out of fellowship (Romans 14, 1Corinthians 12:12, 13, 26, 1Samuel 21, 1Chronicles 21).

8. Dealing With Suffering – Applying Spiritual Daily Orders:

To be a believer is to be associated with suffering. It is not a strange thing, it is our duty, and we are to take it as a soldier takes the rigours of a long campaign; without complaint, and with dignity and strength.

The five “**Daily Orders**” for the battle against the adversary, to be applied in the church age, in the power of the Holy Spirit are found in 1Peter 5:8,9. They will protect us against the cunning of the “lion”.

a) Be Sober! – At all times be self controlled, not under the control of any emotion, or any other substance(drink or drugs), but only by the Holy Spirit. Romans 13:11-13. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 -8.

b) Be Vigilant! – At all times, stay awake to danger, don’t relax your guard, don’t get careless.

c) Resist! – Stand up to, resist, oppose everything he stands for. Zero tolerance of evil is to be the standard for our lives. Also refer, Luke 4:3-12, Ephesians 4:27, 6:11-13, James 4:7.

d) Be steadfast in the faith once delivered to the apostles! Be unbreakable, stand as a solid mass of soldiers resisting attack. Stand with the apostolic doctrines, and their practices. As a local church be united, stand together, tight and committed to each other.

e) Keep on knowing you are not alone! All believers suffer pressures when they stand for their Lord.

OBEDIENCE

1. Obedience is better than offerings (1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 21:3; 28:9). If we are not in God's will, any "worship" we offer is unacceptable.

2. Obedience is something you have to learn. The basic training in obedience has to start in childhood. As it says in (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16) "Honour your father and your mother." (Proverbs 4:3,4; 22:6; 29:15-17; Hebrews 5:8)

3. Teaching your child obedience is an act of love (Proverbs 3:12; 19:18; 23:13-14).

4. We have to obey those who are in authority over us (Exodus 20:12; 22:28; Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:16; Romans 13:1-5; Ephesians 6:1-5; Colossians 3:18-22; Titus 3:1).

5. Those in authority have been put in that position by God (Romans 13:1).

6. Obedience to those in authority is obedience to God (Proverbs 24:21; Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23-24; Romans 13:5).

7. Disobedience to those in authority is disobedience to God (Romans 1:30; 13:2).

8. But when we are ordered to do something that is against God's Will we have to disobey (Acts 4:19; 5:40-42).

9. The fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) is the only commandment with a promise (Proverbs 10:17; Ephesians 6:1-3). Social life in a society is only possible when the people in it have learned to obey.

10. If this commandment is ignored, if the authority of the family is denied or not exercised, society will quickly slide into anarchy (Isaiah 3:12; Proverbs 29:21; 30:21-23; Romans 1:30).

NOTES

CHAPTER 18**INTRODUCTION**

Three years of drought and famine pass before the Lord calls Elijah to approach the pagan king of Israel and challenge him to express faith in the true God of Israel. The great confrontation between the true God and the fake gods of the Baal trinity takes place upon Mt Carmel, and the demons are defeated by the power of the living God. Even after such a great victory however, the pagans hold firm to their viewpoint and Ahab's weakness is seen in his return to his wife's religion even after it has been proved futile and useless. In spite of the great slaughter of the pagan priests and their proven uselessness she maintains her paganism to the very end.

In our day we have had several books out of major seminaries calling the church to what they call "power confrontations" to advance evangelism. This is a chapter that proves that "power confrontations" are not enough to move the determined pagan, but that these still will occur at times in history, so that paganism is proven in each generation to be powerless and useless to meet the needs of man.

This chapter is also a reminder that it is a foolish thing to seek a power confrontation with the enemy unless the Lord has called you and prepared you as He does Elijah in this chapter. Power confrontations ensure the followers of the enemy have no excuse for their evil, but they require strong, mature faith on the part of the believer. Those who go to hell following fake religion go there without excuse before God. Those who are called to confront the enemy in power need to walk in faith in a way that most of us have never seen. This chapter describes God's way of training His mature servant into even more mature faith.

1 KINGS 18:1-46

1 And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. **2** And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. **3** And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: **4** For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) **5** And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. **6** So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. **7** And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? **8** And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. **9** And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? **10** 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, Elijah 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 Ahab, 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 Jezebel 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? **14** And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. **15** And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. **16** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. **17** And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? **18** And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim. **19** Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. **20** So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. **21** And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. **22** Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. **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: **24** And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. **25** And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. **26** And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. **27** And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. **28** And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. **29** And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. **30** And Elijah 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 broken down. **31** And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying,

Israel shall be thy name: 32 And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. 34 And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. 35 And the water ran 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 Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. 37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. 40 And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. 41 And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, 43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. 44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not. 45 And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Three years have passed since the word of warning came to Ahab by Elijah and the drought and resulting famine is very serious in the capital city of Samaria. Elijah receives his next word from the Lord, and it is to leave the safety and anonymity of Zarephath and head back into the heart of Israel and meet with Ahab, who still seeks his life. It is in these verses that we see the malice of the servants of the spiritual enemy of man, and we see the Lord's provision for some amongst his people.

When a nation goes into evil it appears that everyone is involved, and yet there will always tend to be a godly remnant which holds to the truth, and in the worst times some of these people will be kept by the Lord. We meet here the care and the fear of Obadiah who is the governor of the king's palace in Samaria. At the very heart of his administration Ahab has a believer in God as his Prime Minister. We confront the question that has rung down the ages here also. Why is it that some of the prophets of the Lord are killed and only a few are saved? Why does the Lord not save all His servants when Jezebel acts to murder them all?

As we face these questions in our own day also, we confront an issue that only drawing close to the heart of the Lord can answer, for we cannot fully answer this question from our side of time. An early death for a faithful servant of the Lord is not a sign that the Lord "slipped up" in their care of them, but that a plan is being worked out upon this earth that has elements to it that only the eternal life perspective will answer.

We also meet the full malice, and later, the cunning of Jezebel, who is surrounded by her own pagan priests, but has actively sought out and killed the true prophets of the Lord. As we noted in an earlier chapter, the prophets of the Lord mentioned here, are those who have taken the Word of God seriously and are living in "Bible College" like communities, and are travelling preachers of righteousness. They all speak for the Lord; but they are not all men who speak from the Lord like Elijah. Obadiah has been able to rescue one hundred Bible College students and teachers, and he hides them in two great caves, fifty in each, and feeds them at his own expense.

When the followers of the Devil attack the true faith they will attack the leadership and Bible teaching facilities. Satan is aware of the centrality of the Word of God to the power of the people of God, and he knows that to eliminate the teaching of the scriptures is to eliminate the power of the believers over time. Without the honouring of the Word of God, there is no vision from God, and the people perish! Proverbs 1:5-7, 3:1-7, 29:18, 30:5-6.

Obadiah is spoken of as a man who "fears the Lord". This is a concept that is not preached enough today, for it is preached through all scripture as a principle of life and safety for the believer. Psalms 19:9, 25:14, 27:1-3, 147:11, Proverbs 1:7, 3:7, 8:13, 14:26-27, 15:16, 33. As you read these words of David and Solomon you will understand this concept of the "fear of the Lord". For Obadiah the "fear of the Lord" leads him to physically preserve and deliver the servants of the Lord. His faith "works out" in material giving.

You will see that this fear of the Lord is not the fear that the Holy Spirit casts out of our life, but the godly awe and respect for the Lord that is the power that casts out all fear of evil men and death. Romans 8:15, 1 Corinthians 16:10, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 13:6, 1 John 4:18, Revelation 1:17. Read these verses and be encouraged.

Verses 5 – 6. The drought is so severe that all the normal springs of water are starting to dry up and there is no fodder for the horses and the mules that form the backbone of the Army transport and war-making system. Ahab does not care about his people, but he does care about his means of maintaining his power, and so he divides the land between himself and Obadiah and heads away to survey all the water supplies to see if there is any fodder for animals

around these sources that can be requisitioned (read – stolen) for the use of the royal horses and their supply train mules.

At just the right time both Obadiah and Ahab are out in the open fields riding along roads that the Lord intends Elijah to meet them on. Once again we see an example of God's timing. His order for Elijah to rise up from the area of Sidon and head back to Israel is at exactly the right time to meet the two men he needs to meet, and in the right order. Elijah must head back when he is told to meet the king, and he must take the right road in order to meet Obadiah first. Obedience is required of the people of God, and a moment by moment attention to detail through prayerful guidance that we often fall short of. Let us walk with the Lord as Elijah does here and pray our way through each and every situation we meet on our path through this life.

Verses 7 – 14. Obadiah has been riding around doing what he has been tasked to do by the king, but his heart is still fixed upon what the Lord is doing in the land also. He is looking for the Lord's answer to the calamity they face because of their king's great evil. He sees Elijah and immediately falls upon his face before him. Elijah's message to Obadiah is direct and simple; he tells him that he is to go and tell the king that Elijah is back with another message for him from the Lord.

Obadiah is a scared man, and this is understandable, for he has spent the last three years hiding the surviving prophets of the Lord at great personal expense and risk to his life. Fear is not wrong in itself; it is normal in some situations. It is what we do after we feel the fear that determines whether we sin or act righteously. To boldly ride up to the king and tell him that Elijah is back places Obadiah firmly in the camp of Elijah, and will lead the king to conclude that the only reason he has not been able to kill the prophet is that his own palace governor has been hiding him, or at least hiding information about Elijah's whereabouts from him.

Obadiah's speech to Elijah is an interesting one, for it shows the impact of stress upon a good man over a long period of great pressure. He has got to nearly the end of the pressure period and hopes that it will soon be over, but now Elijah has ordered him to precipitate the final crisis. He fears execution by Ahab. His fear of the Lord has not got to a level where he no longer fears men! He is a believer, and he has been brave, but he is not educated in Bible doctrine, and he has not exercised his mature faith so that he trusts the words of the servant of God ahead of his fears.

We hear now of the extent of the hunt for Elijah by Ahab. The king, driven to please his evil queen, has searched far and wide for Elijah so that the prophet may die, but he has clearly not thought of thoroughly searching in the vicinity of Sidon, or if he has, the king of Sidon has not really searched hard.

A foreigner staying with a widow should have been noted as a potential spy by the Sidonians, so the Lord has really protected Elijah here. It is another reminder that if we have a job to do before the Lord, and we are obedient in that task, then we are protected in that job role, and none may touch us until the job is completed.

Obadiah is concerned that Elijah will trick him in some way and flee after speaking so that he cannot be found. Obadiah is demonstrating the sort of flawed logic that I see with men who are burnt out due to too much stress over too long a period. Why would Elijah reveal himself and then hide himself again? Why would the Lord order him to show himself to Ahab and deliver another message and then spirit Elijah away before the message is delivered? Obadiah wants Elijah to know that he has hidden the hundred prophets of the Lord. He doesn't need to say this, but it is the sort of thing that a stressed man blurts out to make himself look good after he has doubted the word of the other man.

All this has the ring of truth in it as an actual exchange, for I would see this sort of behaviour in my clinic weekly with stressed executives. Obadiah ends his speech with the repeated fear that Ahab will kill him. He has trusted the Lord enough to hide the prophets for three long years, but he doesn't trust the Lord to save him now! Let us learn from Obadiah and build our faith through each day by walking in the Spirit. Obadiah is just like us, is he not?

Verses 15 – 20. Elijah covers all he says by the words, "as the Lord liveth", and this phrase is the one to remind Obadiah that he has no need to fear Ahab and the gods he serves, for they do not live at all. Elijah also tells Obadiah that he will meet Ahab that very day, and so there is no worry about his being carried away by the Lord to another place. Elijah must have then simply sat at this place of meeting and prayerfully awaited the arrival of Ahab. I say this because by the time Ahab arrives Elijah is fully ready to confront him and speak the truth to him. At some point the Lord must have given him the instructions that he is to follow upon Mt Carmel, for the things he does there are not dreamed up from his imagination, but are the very instruction of God.

When Ahab sees the prophet he immediately abuses him as the "troubler of Israel", but Elijah is ready for him and correctly retorts that it is the king who has troubled Israel by his Baal worship. The clear causes of Israel's trouble are their forsaking of the commandments of God, and their following after gods that are not God. Elijah now challenges the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. He calls them all to the test of power at Mt Carmel, and specifically calls the 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of the grove, who are the sexualised priests of Ashtoreth who serve Jezebel. From the later account of the conflict, it may be that Jezebel does not let her prophets attend this gathering, for she fears the worst. She certainly is not there.

Ahab sends out the royal command and all the people of Israel, or all their leadership at least, gather at Mt Carmel for the confrontation between God and the demons behind the perverted religion of Baal. The exact site of the confrontation is probably the south-eastern side of the mountain at a place called in Arabic Al Mohraka. The Kishon river runs closest

to Mt Carmel by this place, and the likely site for the altar is framed by a great cliff of solid rock rising 200 feet high behind it. It is about 1000 feet from this site down to the river Kishon, and there would be good visibility of the site from all around, especially for all to see fire fall upon an altar there.

Verses 21 – 25. Elijah gets straight to the point with his speech to the gathered leadership of the people, and all others who have attended. The issue is clear; if the Lord is God then they must serve Him alone, and if the pagan gods are truly lords over them, then let them serve those gods, but whatever they do, it ought to be wholehearted. The people do not answer him a word, for they are themselves undecided and are certainly at this point not committed to the Lord.

The people have been captured by their own lusts and have all compromised themselves with the pagan gods, and so they cannot commit to the Lord because their hearts are not free of the evil hold of the enemy's forces and philosophy. God must act to break the satanic stranglehold these pagan gods have over them. God will act and the demonic forces will be judged and eliminated, but yet these people will not be lastingly revived. Ephesians 2:1-5.

Elijah says boldly that he is the only one who has stood for the Lord, and is standing before them still for the truth. Elijah knows that there are another 100 prophets of the Lord in hiding but they are students of the word and are not worthy of the full title of prophet, for none have stood for God and none stand with Elijah here this day. He is absolutely right; he alone stands for truth this day, and even Obadiah, while a supporter, is silent and standing with his lord Ahab at this point. Elijah draws attention to being totally outnumbered, and invites the pagans to start the contest first, as they are the more numerous. He gives them the right to choose the altar site for themselves, and their own bullock, and their own wood for the altar. He tells them to prepare their sacrifice and then pray for Baal to bring fire to the altar and burn up the sacrifice.

Verses 26 – 29. The rules are accepted and these pagan priests genuinely believe they will have their prayers answered. Like all who have left the path of truth and followed after lies, they have believed strong delusion, and are totally deluded. Satan is capable of miraculous working at times, but not in a situation like this, where he hasn't got the Lord's permission. Satan is powerless before the man of God who walks in the plan and power of God. God's Plan will work out; there is no chance that the devil will win! Exodus 7:10-12, 22, 8:18-19, Romans 1:18-32, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, 2 Timothy 3:8-9.

The pagan priests genuinely believe that if they are sincere enough, then their god will answer them, but they have not seen that their god is under the control/authority of the only true God, for their god is a fallen angel, a demon. Many today argue that sincerity is what the Lord requires of us, but sincerity is not enough, for we can be sincerely wrong! These men are sincerely wrong, and their sincerity will not save them! Truth alone saves us.

Even though the fallen angels (demons) have rejected the Lord's rulership, they remain inferior, and under God's overall control so they can do nothing without God's permission. Satan will not be given permission to unleash his full (but still limited) power until the Lord is ready to allow him to during the Great Tribulation period, and until that time even he is strictly controlled. 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

Elijah appears to be very rude and insulting here, and he is very insulting to the pagans and their dancing about and cutting themselves. We are way too polite today towards paganism, and can take permission from Elijah to bluntly condemn paganism in any conflict the Lord calls us to engage in against it. Elijah is devastating in his abuse of them for their false belief in a god that cannot save them, and for their frantic persistence in their ridiculous rituals.

Believers must be careful to never resemble these pagans. Even today pagans behave this way in their entertainment industry and false "New Age" religions. There is nothing "new" about any of these things. Paganism is not a spent force today, for the demons behind the old religions have not gone away; they have simply adjusted their strategies, appearances, and methods.

The demons are active today and they have the same limited power they have always had, but they are still superior beings to all men alive for they have lived since the beginning of time. It is only in Christ, with the Holy Spirit indwelling us, that we have superior status and access to superior power in God. 1 John 4:4. It is the Lord within who is superior to the demons, not any personal power or ability within us! Men who believe they are superior to the demonic forces are fools indeed and will be beaten up by them like the sons of Sceva. Acts 19:13-16.

Verses 30 – 37. The pagan priests have been fervent in their prayers and their prophesying aloud. This explains the use of the term "prophesying" in this day for us. It was another name for worshipping their god and referred to all ecstatic and expressive worship. These men have really "gone for it", and they have left nothing back in their fervour towards Baal, but he has not answered them. Galatians 4:8. They are whole hearted in their worship of their false god, and the challenge for believers in the true God is that they might be as whole hearted in their own true worship. These people are deluded and even when their god fails them, they keep committed to their false way, and they refuse to repent and return to the Lord God.

Elijah calls the people to draw closer to him, and he gets some of them to do the things he instructs be done here. Each action is a deliberate and thoughtful action designed to underline the superiority of the way of the Lord over the ways of the pagans. Elijah will make it utterly impossible for there to be any answer to his prayer other than the Lord Himself.

Elijah digs a channel around the altar that he has rebuilt. Firstly note that he has rebuilt an old altar dedicated to the Lord here; one that has been previously used for the worship of the Lord by believers upon this hill. He takes twelve stones, one for each of the tribes, a reminder that in God's sight there are not two kingdoms but one covenant people. He built the altar in the name of the Lord, and uses the Lord's name aloud as he does this work to focus the people upon the Lord in what will follow.

He cuts the wood and piles it upon the altar and then piles the pieces of the bullock upon the wood on the altar. There is a giant pile of wood and meat now that all can see. He then takes men from the congregation and gets them to carry water up to the altar and pour it all over it until the wood, the sacrifice, and the trench around it are saturated, and in the end the trench itself is filled with water. Twelve large barrels of water are poured upon the altar; once again one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

This process would have taken some considerable time; possibly several hours. By the time that all this preparation is finished the time of the evening sacrifice has arrived. It is around 6pm and the prophet bows his head and prays aloud for all to hear. He addresses the Lord using the title that encompasses all the twelve tribes again through their unity as sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel. Isaiah 37:15-20, Daniel 9:17-19.

His prayer addresses the request of his heart; that the Lord will honour His name and His purpose this day. It is about God this day, not about Elijah. He seeks the Lord's verification that he has acted as the true servant of the Lord, and not in his own strength or with his own authority. He prays for revival; for the Lord to turn their hearts back to the Lord again. John 16:8-11.

Verses 38 – 46. God's answer is dramatic and timely. Leviticus 9:24, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1. As Elijah says "amen" the fire of God falls and the entire offering is burned up in a millisecond and all the water in the trench evaporates. It is dramatic and powerful, and all the people see that the Lord indeed is superior to Baal and that paganism has no power against the truth. The people immediately fall upon their faces and cry aloud that the Lord indeed is the only true God.

Sadly this great revival will be as lasting as a breath of wind; most of these people will be worshipping Baal again within a few months or years. Great experiences and even divinely produced proofs do not hold disobedient men who prefer to follow pleasure centred belief systems. Beware those who argue for more "power confrontations", for this incident here proves they do not achieve any lasting result unless the hearts of people are changed by the Holy Spirit through time. Notice the next action; it is the ruthless elimination of the false prophets who are Israelites and have rebelled against God and followed after the enemy of God. They are to be executed immediately, and Elijah is very careful to order that not one of them be allowed to escape. Deuteronomy 13:1-18, 18:20-22.

Notice that only the prophets of Baal are mentioned. It may be that the cunning Jezebel kept back her prophets of the groves so that if the 450 died, at least her 400 would be ready to head back out and re-evangelise the people for evil. This woman's evil is thorough and she has played a very clever game. The nation will be re-captured by evil within a few months or years. Remember this incident, for as a leader facing great evil in the last days you will see the cunning of evil men and women and the tenacity of its hold over foolish and gullible people.

Elijah's faith is strong that the drought is also now to be lifted from the land because of the recommitment of the gathered people to the Lord. Even though the people will prove fickle the Lord honours their repentance and the judgment will be lifted – God is gracious indeed. He urges Ahab to eat and drink for he will later need to make haste to return to his summer palace close by, for the rains will come now within a few hours. He confidently states this fact to the king, and its fulfilment will be further evidence that he is indeed the prophet of the Lord.

While the king eats and drinks Elijah heads further up the hill to pray and await the rain. He is exhausted from the posture he adopts on the hill that evening. He sends his servant up to the top of the hill to watch out over the Mediterranean Sea for the clouds to come. The servant is sent up the hill seven times to look for the promised clouds and only on the last trip does he see the hoped for cloud. Elijah is being held in suspense by the Lord here, but the king must finish his meal, and Elijah could also have eaten.

There was no need for Elijah's stress at this point, nor the wasted visits up the hill. He could have waited until the meal was over then checked for clouds. The Lord is in no hurry after three years of drought. God is never in any hurry; He is working to His Plan, and our job is to orient all our behaviours to that fact.

Finally the servant returns and tells the prophet that there is a cloud about the size of a man's fist way out over the sea. Elijah knows that this is the rain storm's beginning and within hours the torrents of rain will make the clay roads impassable. He sends the servant to tell the king to ready his chariot and head off immediately to the palace in case the rain stops him if he delays. There is a real storm brewing and the sky is black with clouds and the wind howls with a hurricane as they head back along the road the short distance to Ahab's summer palace in Jezreel. Elijah has been exhausted by the stress of the day, but the Lord empowers him and he runs ahead of the king all the way to the palace.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. If we have a purifying "fear of the Lord", then we will never fear any man or demon. We are to have this godly respect and awesomeness towards the Creator and Saviour of the world, for then we will have the values that are correct

and the attitudes that purify our life and service. Courage is called for, and the ground of our courage is to see that the Lord alone is to be feared as the judge of all mankind, and that the power of the enemy is only ever "by His permission" only. Let us fear the Lord's bad opinion of our behaviour and so purify our path every day. If we fear the Lord's opinion of us alone we are safe from the threats of men.

2. To serve the Lord requires the courage to stand alone at times, and stand out from the crowd and rebuke their diffidence and hesitation to whole heartedly commit to the path of God. Elijah demonstrates what spending a lot of time alone with the Lord will produce in the soul of a true servant. He is strong and stable in his faith in the Lord and he stands firm against all the efforts of the pagans. Remember, sincerity is not good enough, we must be sincere and right in what we do! The pagan priests of Baal are energetic and fervent; their whole hearted worship is bizarre and false, but they do rebuke our coldness and reserve. Let us be more fervent in our worship of the Lord and whole heartedly serve the living God in sincerity and in truth.

3. Let us be confident in the Lord, as Elijah was. He spoke with confidence of the plan and he expressed it in his words and actions. Let us be confident that our God can deliver us from all the afflictions that come in this world. Let us also be clear; all conflict with the enemy is about the Lord, it is not about us. We are not the issue ever, the Lord is! Let us be totally Christ centred in all we do, and resist the narcissism of the world.

REFLECTION UPON THE LIMITATIONS OF MAN'S PHILOSOPHY

1. Philosophy does not lead to wisdom. (Job 28:12-13,20-21).
2. It is a futile exercise. (Ecclesiastes 8:17; 1 Corinthians 3:19,20)
3. It does not produce happiness. (Ecclesiastes 1:13-18)
4. It leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-22)
5. We cannot find God through it. (Matthew 11:25; 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:20,21; 2:13)
6. Philosophy is useless in preaching (1 Corinthians 1:20,21; 2:1) as it will rob the gospel of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:17). Basic doctrines are then doubted or even denied, as is done in liberal theology.
7. Philosophy is a hindrance in coming to faith. (Acts 17:32; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Timothy 6:20-21)
8. It has to be avoided. (Proverbs 3:5,7; 1 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:20,21).
9. Real wisdom is to know and worship God. (Job 28:28; Psalm 11 1:10; Proverbs 1-7; 9:10; 14:16)
10. Philosophy creates "mental blocks" in the mind. This makes it hard for someone who has been trained in it to understand and accept Biblical truths.
11. A few examples by way of illustration-
 - a) Evolution: Leaves no room for a Creator, that is, for God.
 - b) Humanism: Denies the existence of God, human soul, life after death, heaven, hell, of absolute values in morals or otherwise.
 - c) Psychiatry: Does not keep man responsible for his deeds. It denies the root of all man's problems: sin.
 - d) Anthropology: Teaches evolution in human society. What is called "primitive man" or "stone age man" is, in reality, the end product of degeneration through sin.

Notes

CHAPTER 19**INTRODUCTION**

Great times of victory are also significant times of vulnerability for the servant of the Lord. If we relax after a great victory we will be vulnerable to the Devil's counter punch, for counter punch he always will. Elijah succumbs to his mental exhaustion and the threat of Jezebel drives him to flee for his life. Sadly this action will lead to the resurgence of the evils of Baal worship in the north, as he gives Jezebel time to re-gather her pagan forces.

In his flight however he learns even more of the Holy Character of God, and we learn things that can keep us safe. Elijah's failure here can save us from failure if we hear the lessons he learns and apply them into our own lives. The chapter ends with his meeting of Elisha, and he is ordered to appoint him as his own replacement as key prophet for the north. God has his called leaders, and he has his appointed times for service and then anointed people to pass over leadership to. We must be ready to serve as these men do, and also ready to depart in peace and pass over the Lord's work to our godly replacement.

1 KINGS 19:1-21

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. **2** Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. **3** And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. **4** But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; 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 an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. **6** And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. **7** And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. **8** And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the 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, Elijah? **10** And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. **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: **12** And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. **13** And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? **14** And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. **15** And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: **16** And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. **17** And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. **18** Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him. **19** So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. **20** And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. 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 instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 2. Ahab is like a child in his relationship with his wife and quickly tells her all, possibly expecting her to change, but she doesn't. She is likely what we call today a Personality Disorder profile, (Narcissist with Dependant personality in her weak husband) and this means she is determined in her evil and self centred path, and is not changed by the facts, for her mind is made up. Whatever she says to Ahab is not recorded for us, but her response was such that Elijah believed he could not appeal to the king for safety later, and the Lord pronounces the death penalty upon both Ahab and Jezebel. Like the religious leaders of Jesus day, she will allow no miracle to change her mind about who she will worship. John 11:41-53. She is truly satanic in her self centeredness, as are all true narcissists; they are evil.

Ahab is all ready, at this point, to cast aside the useless gods and follow the Lord again, but he is as weak as water, and he will flow the other way when he hears the threats of Jezebel against him if he weakens further. James 1:2-8. She wastes no time, and having cowed her husband, and secured his return to paganism, she sends her message of threat

to Elijah. He knows she means every word of it. This is a true evil person, and no number of miracles will save her, for she is determined to resist the truth until her own death ends the road she is desperate to remain on.

When we hear the threats of men it is easy to pay attention to them and be overwhelmed by doubt, worry, and by fear for ourselves or others fates. The big lesson of this chapter is that the Lord's servant is in the Lord's hands, for their life and for the time, and the method of their death. Read carefully the following passage in Jeremiah the prophet, for he had to learn this lesson of God's ability to preserve his saints in the midst of danger. Jeremiah 24:1-7, 39:17-18, 45:2-5. We are with the Lord, and the Lord is with us, and there is nothing to fear on the path that God has called us to walk. Be encouraged as we advance through this chapter.

Jezebel moves quickly, and we need to remember this incident, for the devil's people will respond to the victories of the Lord by very speedy and thoroughly evil counter punches. The threat is immediate and Elijah knows he cannot go to sleep in the palace where Ahab has provided him a room, or he will not wake up there in the morning. His only error appears to be that he doesn't pray at this point, he just flees. Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Peter 5:7-9.

Having observed this, let us pause and reflect upon the final outcome, for it is clear from later events that he could not have achieved much more in Israel, given the few who are standing for God there. God will work all the events that occur here for blessing to His called people. Romans 8:28. Elijah is unable to do more than he has done, for the hold of evil is too great upon the king, the court, and the people. At times we will be called to give the last message of hope to people who prefer hopelessness, and we must be faithful to our message from the Lord, and rejoice in his blessing of the evil people, but with sadness walk away from them after they have finally rejected truth.

Verses 3 – 4. When Elijah sees that the hatred of Jezebel is at fever pitch and she is determined to kill him over night, he flees immediately for the south and doesn't stop walking/running until he reaches Beersheba in the far south of the land of Judah. He leaves his servant there and heads a day's journey into the wilderness area to the south where Israel had camped five hundred years before. He stays in the area called the Wilderness of Zin/Sin. Numbers 20:1-13. It is an appropriate place to be, for he, like his ancestors before him, is feeling like a good time of moaning before the Lord. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:5. He is in understandable despair, for he knows what Jezebel's victory means in the north, and he knows that Obadiah and others will die and the nation will now certainly be judged!

While this area is known as the place of moaning (Meribah) it was also the place of God's provision, with water from the rock and guidance forward as to the path they were to take into the Promised Land. Their moaning didn't stop their reception of the land, it just made the road to rest a little harder and longer. Elijah is depressed and in despair about himself. He is, as we say it today, "beating himself up" here. He knows that he has failed the final test and fled, but he is exhausted, and he just collapses upon the Lord and casts his cares upon Him. 1 Peter 5:5-9. Praise God, that our failure does not stop the plan of God. When we fall into exhaustion in the work the Lord doesn't hammer us into the ground, he lifts us up!

Verses 5 – 6. He rests under a Juniper tree. These trees, a species of the Broom family, grew abundantly in this area in this day, and are still to be found there. They were used as places for encampment as they provided shade all day from the fierce sun. He is asleep but God is looking after him and protecting him. His exhaustion is such that the angel who comes with a meal for him must strike him to wake him up. Acts 12:6-10. Elijah is totally exhausted, and even when the angel awakens him, he eats and then falls asleep again. Psalms 103:8-15.

We are not told how long he sleeps, but it is not uncommon for men to sleep two or three days after the total collapse described here. The Israeli Army has developed a technique around this fact to recover people from mental and physical exhaustion. It is called the "Forty-eight Hour Dark Room Rest". It involves the soldier being placed in a darkened room, and being left to sleep (or assisted with medication to sleep) for forty-eight hours, with only liquids. They get up on the third day and 80% are recovered enough to resume light duties. It is a good trick to remember when totally exhausted.

Verses 7 – 8. The angel of the Lord returns with a second meal and wakes the sleeping prophet again to eat it, and this time He tells him what he is to do next. Note the angel's title; He is the "Angel of the Lord". This is the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Angel of the Lord does not mince His words; the journey is far too hard for Elijah to take, but with the Lord's provisions he will make it. He is called to go to another place where the Israelites met the Lord; he is called to Horeb, the Mount of God.

This is a mountain in Arabia, and the evidence that the so called "Mt Sinai" on the Sinai Peninsula is not the mountain, is the time frame to get there. Remember the present mountain known as Mt Sinai was only identified as such by the mother of Constantine, the Empress Helena, in the fourth century of our own era, and so not too much credence needs to be given to its authenticity. Mt Sinai on the peninsula would have been reached in four or five days easy walking from the Wilderness of Zin, but Horeb in Arabia would have taken forty days of walking. Paul will later head into the same area for contemplation before his great ministry begins. Galatians 1:17, 4:25. The food Elijah eats is angel's food and he is able to walk all the way without any more major meals.

Don't look for natural explanations of these events, for this is a unique interaction between God and his very special servant, and events here are not replicated many times in the entire history of man. Moses and Elijah are the only two in the Old Testament who experience the divine interactions that are anything like those recorded here, and this is the indication that they are both very special men in His plan. They are linked together by the last prophet of the Old Testament as still having a part to play at the end of time. Malachi 4:2-6, Revelation 11:1-14.

Verses 9 – 10. He reaches the Arabian mountain where over five hundred years before the Israelites camped, and he rests in a cave on the mountain. After he has rested the Lord speaks to him again. The Lord will ask him the same question twice while he is here, and he has walked for over forty days to get this message, so it is an important one, and so let us make sure we get the significance of this also. Notice the question here and later in verse 13. “What are you doing here Elijah?” Now the obvious answer to this question is, “you told me to come here and sent an angel to make sure I could get here”.

The question has far more than the obvious meaning behind it, and Elijah sees that, and his answer betrays his present self-centeredness, and “poor me” feelings at this point. Notice his words in verses 10 and 14 later. He is truly here because of his service, which has led to the hatred of the queen, but he is here rather than back in Israel for the same reason as the Exodus Generation was here before him; to learn to trust the Lord his God even more than he does at this point. Even having seen the miracle of the grain and the oil and receiving divine guidance through the years, he has fallen at the post and failed to believe that the Lord could deal with Jezebel, as he was enabled to deal with the prophets of Baal.

Verses 11 – 14. Elijah has possibly “stumbled in unbelief” at a vulnerable point to total exhaustion. Proverbs 4:12-19, Hebrews 3:14-19. We can understand him, and God certainly does. He needs to draw close again to the Lord, and see that it is not in the dramatic places that strength is found, but in the quiet places where we simply listen for the voice of the Lord in the quietness of our heart. As he had drawn strength daily with the widow and her son in Zarephath so he must learn again, after the drama of Mt Carmel, to draw strength from the Lord in quietness again.

Strength needs to be found by us all in the quietness of our hearts, not in the drama of public events and the praises and fellowship of other people. Many believers today are too dependent upon others for their support in ministry and it disables them over time. We are not to trust other people to uphold us; we are to trust the Lord alone, and rest upon fellowship with Him in the quiet places of the heart. To serve the Lord we must draw strength from within our own hearts, in the quiet times of the soul, for all others are weak just like us, and none can be trusted other than the Lord, the Holy Spirit and the Guardian angel assigned to us! John 2:24-25.

The drama of the confrontation upon Mt Carmel and the thunder storm following is repeated in the atmosphere outside the cave on Mt Horeb. A great wind is first, and it smashes the rocks off the great mountain, but the Lord does not speak through the wind. Then there was an earthquake and the entire mountain was tossed like a rag doll, and the rocks fell around him, but the Lord did not speak from the midst of the earthquake.

Then the most frightening thing by far occurs, a great fire is started and the dry brush around Elijah catches fire, and the flames sweep around him, up and around the mountain, but the Lord does not speak from the fire. Each of these great natural events Elijah is required to stand in the midst of, and each event is life-threatening to anyone in the open that day. This is a show of power and might that is similar to that when the Lord gave the Law upon this same mountain. Exodus 19:21-25, 20:18.

There are two important things for Elijah, and for us to grasp hold of in these three great celestial shows of power. It is vital to note that the Lord was not speaking in the drama of the celestial shows that He put on. God was certainly behind all the atmospheric signs, but He did not speak through them except to underline that the world is a created space and time universe and He is the creator. This was important in itself, for if the Lord could create and control the universe, then Elijah could trust Him to deal with Jezebel and any other threats.

The even more important point for Elijah to grasp was that contact with him was not through the powers of nature, but through the quietness of the Lord’s “still small voice” within his heart. The Lord wants us all to listen and draw close to Him so that His communication with us is intimate and personal. When the Lord repeats the question, “What are you doing here Elijah?”, the prophet repeats his “poor me” answer. The Lord is ready for this and will answer him and correct him by ordering his next task.

Verses 15 – 18. The Lord does not give correction as we give correction. There is no rebuke here at all, just a simple instruction as to the next task Elijah is tasked with by the Lord. This is encouraging, for it tells Elijah that his questioning of the Lord has not led to his being judged and condemned; he has been reassigned a new set of tasks. He is still, “on the team” but his days are now numbered upon the earth, for he is of a great age at this point. The Lord doesn’t correct us with the logic of man, but with the tasking associated with the eternal plan of God, and we are not finished on this earth until he calls us home. We are never to think in terms of retirement, but always in terms of service and the next opportunity.

We are a part of the eternal plan of God and our job is to get with the plan and serve the Lord, not receive detailed explanations for things we are not equipped (this side of eternity) to really understand. Faith means trust in the character of the one we place our faith in. Hebrews 11:1-3. Elijah has learned that the Lord is to be trusted and that He speaks quietly and powerfully and that drama is not needed, but absolute trust and obedience is always needed. He will be passing over his role to another, and his task is to teach his replacement through the handover period to hold to the Lord in all things.

Elijah is given three tasks to complete before he passes from the pages of history. Firstly he is head back to Israel by the desert road to Damascus. This will be the highway later made famous by Lawrence of Arabia. It runs from Mecca and

Medina right through to Damascus and will be an important trading road for centuries after Elijah walks it. He is to find Hazael and anoint him king over Syria. He is then to go to Samaria and anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel. These two are God's appointed vessels to bring judgement upon the house of Ahab. Ahab's weakness in not controlling his wife, and eliminating her paganism will lead to the extermination of his house, just as the house of Jeroboam was eliminated.

He is also to anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, as his replacement, for he is being relieved of his duties. This is not to be seen as a judgement upon him, for he is obedient to the end, and will go to be with the Lord in glory. The Lord finishes this instruction with a correction to Elijah's thoughts that he was the only one left who served the Lord in the land. The Lord tells Elijah that there are seven thousand grown men and women, who have not served Baal. This is a small number considering the population of over a million, but there are some left, and Elijah's role is to mobilise them by the ministry of the Word of God.

Verses 19 – 21. Elijah is led by the Spirit to get Elisha on board as a team member first, so that he can start his learning in observing the other two tasks he has to do. So Elijah heads first for the town where Elisha lives and anoints him as his replacement by casting his mantle upon the young man as he ploughs with twelve yoke of oxen. Now this is symbolic of the twelve tribes to whom he has been called for ministry, but it is also a real picture. There really are twelve yoke of oxen ploughing/clearing the field and controlled by this one man. This may be clearing a field of large rocks or trees for ploughing. Twelve oxen/bullocks were used this way in New Zealand in the 1800-1900s.

This tells us that Elisha is an incredibly physically strong man and a very gifted one to be able to do this, and this strength of body and ability to work with difficult animals will be drawn upon in his later service. The Lord's call is nearly always upon those who have proved themselves in other areas of work; the Lord does not call those who are inactive or lazy. The best preparation for ministry is always to excel in whatever area you have been called to work until the call to ministry comes. Amos 7:12-16.

Elisha is ready to receive the call and immediately chases after Elijah and seeks only permission to say goodbye to his parents and arrange for a farm hand to finish his work in the fields. Elijah makes it hard to follow him by challenging him to only follow if he is really ready for the hardships that will come on the path that lies ahead.

Elisha is ready for the challenge and immediately offers up a sacrifice, clearly something he has done many times before. He calls a feast for all the farm workers and neighbours so that he can announce to them his decision to follow Elijah also. This total commitment is what the older prophet is looking for. Having given to all from the sacrificial feast he heads away after Elijah and becomes his minister, just as Joshua did for Moses. Exodus 24:13, Joshua 1:1. He will learn by close daily observation and joint study of the Word of God to be the prophet the Lord has called him to be.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. We are called to walk in faith, and not succumb to fear of man or Satan. Our lives are to be centred in the Lord and His power to guide us and to keep us on the paths that He has guided us along. Let us walk with the Lord, and in our close fellowship with Him deal with any fears by casting them upon the Lord. If we need an angel, in addition to our own guardian angel, then the Lord will send one to us. Let us relax in the Lord's provision for us on the path He has called us to walk. Let us also praise God that our failures do not stop or hinder His blessings to us. While we live He has something for us to do, and we can be sure when our job is done, for we will be looking at Him face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
2. We are not to expect long winded explanations from the Lord about why certain things have happened to us in this life, for on the other side of time when we are in eternity we will see all things clearly. We are to learn to wait until then and focus upon the next order for our service of the one who went to the Cross for us. Let us be active in service, not pre-occupied and distracted with questions that will be answered in heaven. Let us learn to wait for the Lord's timing for the answers to our many questions.
3. Elisha is busy in the work of the farm/family when he is met by Elijah. He is active in his assigned task, and he is an expert in what he does, and he is focused upon his tasking. The best are called, not the lazy, the slack, ineffectual, and the tired. The Lord calls His servants as they were active, either fishing or in other work, and so He calls us. Let us be busy in whatever the Lord has called us to do, and so by building our expertise in our field we build our preparedness for the things God wants of us. Let us encourage young believers to excel at whatever they do, for in so doing they prepare for future ministry.

REFLECTION UPON FEAR

1. Fear is seen in two ways in scripture.
 - [a] Firstly as a mental attitude sin that is incompatible with our status as children of the most high, the ruler of the universe.
 - [b] Secondly it is used to describe the correct attitude towards God the Lord for all His creatures. There is godly fear, awe, and respect for God as God, and there is inappropriate fear, which is the cringing fear of one who believes the other is able to hurt them. This second kind is wrong for us as children of God, for none can harm us without God's permission for we belong to Him.

2. Our occupation with the persons and majesty of God is often spoken of as "fear" in the legitimate sense for believers. 2 Samuel 23:2-3, Nehemiah 5:9, Job 28:28, Psalms 19:9, 34:11-12, 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 10:27, 22:4, Malachi 3:16, Ephesians 5:21.
3. Fear as a mental attitude sin is spoken of in, 1 Samuel 17:11, 24, Proverbs 29:25.
4. In God's grace plan for us fear of men and things has no place. His plans for us are always divinely good, and any testing situation is for our good. Romans 8:28.
5. Fear is an expression of a failure of faith in the plan. Exodus 14:13-14, Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 8:1, 1 Chronicles 28:20, Isaiah 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7.
6. Spiritual death is one way of describing Satan's kingdom and is the place of the source of fear. Hebrews 2:14,15
7. In spiritual death, Adam was afraid. Genesis 3:10, this fear motivated Adam to produce religious activity (fig leaves) and lies. Genesis 3:7
8. Salvation removes the basis of fear, which is condemnation from the Justice of God (spiritual death).
9. Spiritual maturity provides freedom from fear. 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 13:6, 1 John 4:18, 1 Corinthians 13:5b
10. Carnality and any form of religious activity that leads us away from grace and daily obedience to the Word enslaves the believer to Satan through fear. Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:15
11. The mature believer is commanded to fear nothing he may suffer in life, for by means of God's grace provision all we ever may need is provided for us. Revelation 2:10
12. The baby believer is sustained by believing God's Word, obeying his commands hour by hour to daily life, and rest upon his promises. Hebrews 4
13. As we become mature believers we continue with this resting on the promises but in addition to this we are sustained by our understanding / application of entire categories of God's Word - we have then moved beyond the promises to confidence in the very character of God itself.
14. Illustration: A woman who asks every hour, "Do you love me?" needs assurance through many promises, and many actions backing the promises up. Once she gets to truly know her husband, and her love is fully established in him through his faithfulness to her, she has absolute assurance, and doesn't need constant reminders of his love by specific words. She is full of confidence through knowledge of her husband's character.
15. Chapter's 3-6 of Hebrews deal with the falling away from growth and confidence by these believers. The spiritual principle of Chapter 4 is the means of getting them back on target.
16. In Hebrews 13:6, we see the objective of the writer, freedom from fear by their daily, moment by moment living the awareness of the love of Christ for them, and the power of Christ available to them.
17. The writers of Scripture identify correctly that when the believer is fearful, he imitates the unbeliever ("cowardly" – Revelation 21:8), and that is not right given our great position. Hebrews 11:27 "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is unseen." This is our standard!
18. Fear is a mental attitude sin that shows our mind has moved away from thinking of the Lord. 1 Samuel 17:11,24
19. Fear is a sign of falling back into domination by the "prince of this world". 1 Samuel 18:12,29, 21:12, 28:20
20. Absence of fear is a big part of maintaining a dynamic mental attitude. Hebrews 13:6, 11:27
21. There is only one legitimate fear; it is the fear of failure to enter spiritual maturity. Hebrews 4:1
22. Love demands absence of fear. 1 John 4:18. They are two opposing mental attitudes.
23. Fear is not part of the Divine Plan for the Believer. 2 Timothy 1:7; Exodus 14:13-14; Joshua 8:1; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Samuel 1:7
24. Courage and lack of fear is a sign of mature spiritual status. Psalm 3:6, 56:3; Hebrews 11:27
25. Fear is the power by which the Evil of Satan rules among mankind. Hebrews 2:14-15; Genesis 19:30 (Lot); 1 Kings 18:9-14 (Obadiah), both Lot and Obadiah show how the failing believer lives in constant fear.

26. Fear is the word used to mean "Occupation with Christ" when related to the attitude of the mature Believer toward Christ. 2 Samuel 23:3; Nehemiah 5:9,15; Ephesians 5:21; Job 28:28; Psalm 19:9, 34:10; Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 10:27; 1 Peter 2:17

THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH (THE LORD)

1. The Angel of Jehovah is identified as Jehovah (Genesis 16:7-13, 22:11-18, 31:11-13, Exodus 13:21 cf. 14:19, Judges 6:11-23).
2. The Angel of Jehovah is distinguished from Jehovah (Genesis 24:7, Exodus 23:20, 1 Chronicles 21:15-18, Zechariah 1:12-13).
3. The Angel of Jehovah is therefore a member of the Trinity – the same as Jehovah, but distinct from Jehovah.
4. God the Father and Holy Spirit cannot be seen by man face to face (Exodus 33:18-23; John 14:17).
5. Therefore, the Angel of Jehovah is the second Person of the Trinity: the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) Jesus Christ identifies Himself as Jehovah (I AM) (John 8:58)
 - b) The Lord Jesus Christ is the visible/manifest member of the Trinity (John 1:18, 6:46, 1 Timothy 6:15-16).
 - c) The Angel of Jehovah never appears after the Incarnation (John 1:18, 6:46, 1 Timothy 6:15, 16, 1 John 4:12)
 - d) Both the Angel of Jehovah and Jesus Christ are sent by Jehovah (the Father).
6. The Angel of Jehovah appeared only in the Old Testament.
 - a) He wrestled with Jacob. (Genesis 32:24-30)
 - b) He redeemed Jacob from all evil. (Genesis 48:16)
 - c) He spoke to Moses from the burning bush. (Exodus 3:2)
 - d) He protected Israel at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:19)
 - e) He prepared Israel for the Promised Land. (Exodus 23:20-23)
 - f) He reassured Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15)
 - g) He commissioned Gideon (Judges 6:11-23)
 - h) He ministered to Elijah. (1 Kings 19:5-7)
 - i) He saved Jerusalem from Sennacherib. (Isaiah 37:36)
 - j) He preserved Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego in the furnace. (Daniel 3:25)

Notes

CHAPTER 20**INTRODUCTION**

We love to quote Shakespeare's Portia, when she said, "The Quality of mercy is not strained". By this we mean that mercy is always to be shown whenever it is possible, and safe to do so. Mercy shown to one's ordinary enemy is the sign of nobility in the victory we have been taught, and in some situations it is commanded and commended. Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:19-20.

History teaches that in some situations mercy would have saved future conflict. The end of World War I is an example where mercy was not shown to Germany, and it set the stage for World War II. Wise men however use spiritual discernment regarding when and where mercy can be safely shown, for mercy shown to thoroughly determined and evil men simply magnifies their evil; for let free they will work their evil plans further and further.

Churchill summed up the good side of this principle in his motto for his history of World War II in his famous phrase, "In War – Resolution, in Defeat – Defiance, in Victory – Magnanimity, in Peace – Goodwill". He did not apply these principles however to Hitler or his henchmen, for they were to be dealt with by absolutely ruthless justice, and they were at Nuremburg, and they were all executed or spent the rest of their evil lives in prison. The common people can be spared, for they are followers, but the evil leaders of the foolish rabble must never be given the second chance to destroy the innocent.

Spiritual discernment is needed to distinguish situations when mercy is rightly shown, and justice is rightly executed. This principle applies in churches, where those who have tried to seize power against the anointed of the Lord must be cast out, and must not return until they have fully repented of their evil, and have Holy Spirit fruit filled lives as evidence of their changed behaviour pattern.

The evil man we meet in this chapter, King Ben-Hadad of Syria, (the son of the king who conquered cities in the Galilee in the reign of Baasha – chapter 15:20) is a thoroughly evil man, and the Lord God has handed him over for destruction, and in grace gives Ahab the opportunity to serve God and all the surrounding people by killing him. Ahab's weakness emerges again, and to the later loss of hundreds of thousands of his own and other people, he releases him to continue working his evil.

In this chapter we see some of the reasons the Bible supports Capital Punishment for those who are sold under evil, for such men are determined servants of Satan and will simply create more victims if quickly forgiven and forgotten. Evil does not go away and mellow over time, it becomes more evil and bitter and vengeance filled. In our own nation we have lost over twenty innocent lives in the last ten years to criminals who had been let out on parole by weak laws and weaker parole boards. Evil doesn't tend to spontaneously change over time, and those who do not recognise the need to eliminate evil men and women, will see its victims lying unburied in the streets.

There are no such things as "human rights" without human responsibilities as far as the scripture is concerned, and any person who kills without just cause has eliminated any reason to be shown mercy by another. Good men may appeal for mercy, but those who have worked any great evil must repent, and give evidence of such repentance, before they call for such a thing.

1 KINGS 20:1-43

1 And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots; and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. **2** And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad, **3** Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. **4** And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have. **5** And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; **6** Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away. **7** Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. **8** And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. **9** Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. **10** And Benhadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. **11** And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off. **12** And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. **13** And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. **14** And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered,

Thou. 15 Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand. 16 And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. 17 And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. 18 And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. 19 So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. 20 And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. 21 And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. 22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee. 23 And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. 24 And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: 25 And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. 26 And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. 27 And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country. 28 And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. 29 And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. 30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. 31 And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. 32 So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? He is my brother. 33 Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. 34 And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. 35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. 36 Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. 37 Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. 38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. 39 And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. 40 And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. 41 And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. 42 And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. 43 And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. This king of Syria is a brutal bully, as many are in power. He has gained power through his father's violence and he is determined to use that power to abuse and control all his neighbours. His orders are commands to an inferior and Ahab feels inferior, for he has been caught napping by the invasion that like a lightning bolt breaks over his land. He is caught like a bird in the cage of Samaria, with his princes and only 7000 men. Are these the same 7000 who have not bowed their knee to Baal? We have no evidence of that, but the exact same number as has been given to Elijah, chapter 19:18, makes us think that the writer is identifying this army as made up of believers.

Ben-Hadad has come with twenty two allies, each kings of their own tribute paying towns who are required to accompany him on his wars with their armed forces. The siege is placed around the city without Ahab being able to gather the tribal levies from the north and east, and so Ben-Hadad has the upper hand and orders complete surrender of the city and the handing over of all the silver and gold, and the most pleasing and attractive of the wives and children of the king also.

While this may be a legitimate demand for tribute from a vassal state, it may also be far more sinister. Is he then going to have children from Ahab's wives and daughters, and place his son on the throne after Ahab? The demand is possibly a standard one, but the feeling behind it is that it is an insult, and is deliberately evil to an extreme. Ahab rolls over on his back, like a beaten dog (verse 4), and agrees to the demands. Now I may be too harsh on the king here, for he may be

simply buying time, but one thing he is not doing is praying to the Lord God of Israel! He has seen God's power on Mt Carmel, but he is still under the power and influence of his evil wife, and lacks moral courage.

Verses 5 - 7. The second demand of the Syrian king is even worse than the first. It was common for a besieging army to demand gold and silver to go away, and even demand hostages from the royal family for future "good behaviour", but to loot and pillage the palace at their own will was the sign of total and abject defeat. They are demanding the right to enter the city with their army and loot every house in the city without anyone raising a hand against them. The possibility that they will then kill all they wish to kill and enslave the rest is very high, for the city will be at the mercy of evil men.

To surrender to evil men is to open the door to greater evils! As Winston Churchill saw clearly in the dark days of 1940, after the fall of France to the Nazi forces, there was no alternative but to fight the Germans to the bitter end, for surrender to such an evil dictatorship was to open the then free nations to evils beyond words. Ahab now sees this clearly also, and he calls his elders and briefs them on the second message. He may have dealt with the first one himself, although it was normal for all decisions to be run past the inner council at least, but this second message demands that all think, pray and respond thoughtfully, for if they are going to resist, all must be ready to die fighting for their families. Nehemiah 4:4-18, Romans 8:33-39.

Verses 8 – 10. The elders give their decision immediately, and it is a message of absolute defiance. They will not be insulted by Ben Hadad; they will fight and not surrender. Their courage strengthens the weak king and the Lord in grace gives him the words of a prophet to strengthen him further. The message that is given to the messengers of Ben Hadad is clear and to the point. Ahab was prepared to pay tribute for protection, as Baasha had done beforehand, and even to give up his children and some wives as hostages for future good behaviour, but he will not submit to the insulting threats made this second time. When the messengers return it is with the threat from Ben-Hadad that he will reduce Samaria to dusty rubble.

Verses 11 – 14. Ahab gives a reply to the messengers of the evil king in the form of a proverbial saying. Today we say, "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched", and Ahab reminds Ben-Hadad that he shouldn't celebrate his victory before he is taking off his armour after the battle is won. Ben-Hadad is a boaster and his boasting is premature. Ahab is not trusting God at this point, but he is looking for the right way to resist the arrogance of the evil enemy he faces. In his time of need the Lord sends a prophet to him. We are not told this man's name, but he comes with the Lord's word to the still pagan king. It is a second message of the powerful deliverance of the Lord. He has seen the work of God upon Mt Carmel, and now he will see it outside the walls of Samaria.

When the enemy king hears the message from Ahab he is drinking with his fellow kings in his battle tent outside the walls of Samaria. He immediately calls his army to be stood to attention in its units and prepare to assault the city directly. The entire army is set in array against the city and stands there at attention for the rest of that morning. Ben-Hadad stays in his tent and keeps drinking with his fellow kings. The timing of the Israelite attack, at around noon, tells us that this king is a serious alcoholic, as he is drinking to the point of drunkenness well before lunch time. This arrogance, drunkenness, and hesitancy to take charge of his army, will cost him the battle.

The prophet's message to Ahab is direct and encouraging. He calls the king to look out upon the vast army of the Syrians and then reflect upon the power of the Lord their God and depend upon the Lord alone for victory and receive the orders of the Lord. The purpose of all this is that the king might know that the Lord is truly God and that the worship of the true God might return to Israel. Ahab then asks who will lead the troop units in the assault and he is told the princes of the realm, and then he asks who is to order the battle and take overall command, and the prophet answers, "You are to take charge and be the general".

Verses 15 – 21. Ahab counts the armed men he has ready to fight with him. He has 232 "princes", and 7000 fighting men inside the city. These princes maybe his own sons, and/or the provincial governors, or the elders sons of the ten northern tribes. The term "prince" has all these meanings from the days of Moses through to Ahab's own day. The princes will take charge of the units of the infantry. This means that each prince will have about 30 men to lead. The army will be made up of 232 tight fighting units of 30 each, and several hundred will be left as a royal guard at the centre of the line. Each unit will be able to operate individually and will be able to be coordinated by their prince.

The Syrians are lined up around the outside of the city of Samaria. Their army will be divided into four units to ensure each side is covered, and so there will be several miles between the various units of the Syrian army. They are expecting a siege and assault on the walls as the next step. They are not expecting a sally from the city by the entire Israelite Army led by their king. The benefit Ahab has is that he has to attack only ¼ of the enemy army, as the rest are on the other three sides of the city. The sally immediately quarters the enemy's strength.

Ben-Hadad is still drinking, and the writer notes he is well drunk by this point, something that no leader of men can ever be – drunkenness is a fatal weakness and makes any person unfit to lead, as he/she cannot control themselves. He hears the report that some men are coming out of the city, and he gives a casual order to capture them alive, whether they come in peace or for war. This arrogant order, given without leaving his drinking party, or checking the size of the sally force, is a fatal one for his army.

The Israelites are well briefed by Ahab. Following the orders from the prophet of the Lord he has told them to move out in their units, and fan out across the entire front, and attack their enemies and start killing them, and keep killing them until

they break and flee. They obey their orders well, and the small units are all well led by courageous princes. They pour out the city gate at the run, and in their units they peel off to left and right and go straight onto the attack before the king of Syria even realises the attack has begun and orders any counter strike.

The speedy and effective violence of the Israelites is devastating to the over confident Syrian Army and the men drawn up in ranks in front of Ben-Hadad's drinking tent either fall dead or flee. The stupid king drunkenly is hoisted upon his horse and flees himself from the field. The army of Israel then wheels around to left and right and in a tight formation assaults the armies of the Syrians drawn up on each of the other sides of Samaria. Each flees in panic, and any who stand are cut down by the enthusiastic and now victorious Israelites. Ahab himself enters the battle early at the centre of the line with his own Guard, and slays the chariot and cavalry forces himself and there is a great slaughter of the defeated Syrians and their allies.

Verses 22 – 25. The prophet returns to the king on the field of battle and gives him further instruction in order to consolidate the victory this day. He is told to rebuild his army and call up his tribal levies for the king of Syria will return by the end of a year to have a second attempt at destroying Israel.

The servants of Ben-Hadad now come to their king and try to explain away the defeat, avoiding the real reason (that he is an alcoholic, overconfident, drunken idiot!) They blame their gods for not being very good in the hill country, and saying that Israel's gods are clearly hill country gods and that the next battle should be on the plain. This superstitious nonsense is what can be expected from pagans. It is the nonsense pagans speak when they do not want to accept that their gods are useless. God's point to Ahab has been to show him that all the gods are useless, and that safety is with Him alone.

Ben-Hadad's advisors encourage him to rebuild his army, but forget the leadership of the drunken kings, and appoint professional soldiers to command this time. This advice would appear to explain why his army broke so easily, as their allies, while adding numbers did not add quality in fighting skill or generalship. These twenty two kings were all like Ben-Hadad, they all believed they were superior to Ahab and could defeat him easily, and the advisors are keen to get the real army officer corps back in charge of the army. Narcissism always disqualifies people from leadership, as over-confidence means the leader does not correctly assess the enemy or task.

Verses 26 – 31. There is no mention of Ahab doing anything spiritual between the first battle and the second, and that is a worrying sign that he is still holding to his paganism, or at least playing with it still. His wife has not been mentioned since threatening Elijah, but we cannot argue any decline in her influence from the silence of the text. Every action and the clear spiritual inaction of Ahab speaks of Jezebel's on going evil influence, and his character weakness.

The Syrians attack at the end of the next year and set their camp at Aphek this time, and on this flat land they hope they can get their chariot-gods to win their victory. Ahab goes out to meet them, but he is still under strength and his two army groups are like "little herds of goats on the hills" while the Syrian host fills the valley and the plain before them. The enemy have the walled city behind them and the plain before them and there is little human hope for Israel in any direct attack. Ben-Hadad hopes he has the tables well turned this time.

A prophet of the Lord comes again to the king Ahab. It may not be the same man as before, and our writer does not have a name for either prophet, as he is writing many years later. We will note through this book, and the next, that when the writer has a name he will give it. He comes to follow up the word from earlier in the year, and the word is also a word of encouragement, and specific instruction. The prophet makes it clear that the Lord will judge the Syrians because of their arrogance in stating that the Lord is the god of the hills but their gods are the gods of the plains. God will make it clear by and through the victory He will give the Israelites that He is God over all the heavens and the earth.

Once again the purpose of the Lord is that Ahab himself might know that He, the Lord, is the God of Israel, and so worship Him alone. This king has been given now three very definite instances of proofs that the Lord is God and he has no excuse for any playing with his old paganism. Sadly the sexualised worship of Baal and Ashtoreth is, like modern pornography, very addictive, and its hold upon Ahab will finally prove too strong, and tragically he will not shake free from the satanic grip of his wife and her religion.

Let none argue God is unfair in his judgment of this man. Let each leader be sure of this principle in their own life, for grace will most often be shown to flawed leaders, but there is a limited time frame for them to "wise up" and change their ways, before they are swept away.

The two armies pitch opposite each other and camp for seven days before battle is joined. This was not unusual in the ancient world and psychological warfare was at the heart of this, with daily parades, shows of strength, speeches to each other, and deputations to and fro. Ahab has received the promise of the Lord, and he is again to take charge and give the orders.

On the seventh day he believes the time is right and he urges his men forward in a sudden attack upon the Syrians. Humanly speaking this was a suicidal tactic, but it catches the enemy off guard, for it is the last thing they expect. They reel backwards and are slaughtered by the smaller, but tighter army. The casualties are heavy on the Syrian side and their army breaks and flees, many into the city of Aphek where they overload a section of the wall and it falls down and kills several thousand ("elephs" – units) more of them. The Israelites don't pour immediately into that city to slay the survivors of the wall collapse and Ben-Hadad's cunning advisors give him clever advice to remain alive.

Ahab as a general has failed to fully follow through on the collapse of the wall of the city, especially when his men must have seen the royal guard and enemy king flee within its walls. His army will be out pursuing the remnants of the enemy army across the open plain and slaying them as they go, but the key man to be killed is their enemy's leader, and Ahab should have been more in control of his forces pursuit, and recalled them by this point. In military strategy the smart general focuses upon the elimination of the enemy general, for with him gone, all real opposition will crumble away. Killing large numbers of ordinary soldiers is irrelevant and unnecessary, but the death of their leader is of supreme significance. God's purpose was that this evil king be eliminated and the new man take charge. 1 Kings 19:15.

The councillors of Ben-Hadad are cunning for they know Ahab's weakness of character; they believe he will be weak enough to forgive their king and so give them all another chance to destroy Israel. They pretend repentance and sorrow by the sackcloth and ashes mourning routine. Many evil men are truly sorry for their evils, but they are only sorry that they have been caught out in them. This is why a clear distinction is made in the scripture between feeling sorry for sin, and true repentance from sin.

Verses 32 – 34. The councillors of the evil king are proved correct in their assessment of Ahab, and Ben-Hadad is forgiven and let go, when the truth about his words and deeds cried out for his immediate execution to stop further evils. They flatter Ahab by having their king turn the vassal-lord tables and having their king act as if he is the vassal of Ahab. This appeals to his pride and wins him over. He is too quick saying, "he is my brother", for this man is the servant of evil. If this man is indeed his brother, then Ahab is indeed a fool and a pagan still!

The councillors are quick witted and cunning and immediately seize on the use of the word "brother" and play that word up. Ahab asks that Ben-Hadad be brought to him, and he comes in fake humility and penitence. Ahab doesn't see how well fooled he is, because narcissists do not spot other's deception if they are being praised or lifted up. The weakness of narcissism is that it is self centred, and they only see what "suits" their image of themselves. It becomes clear to everyone else however when Ben-Hadad speaks in verse 34. It is King Ahab who should be speaking, not the defeated Ben-Hadad at all.

The towns seized by Ben-Hadad's father are automatically back in Israel's area of control and any other town Ahab wants he can now take with force, but he accepts the offer of this king who should be in no position to offer anything. He then adds stupidity to his foolishness and make a covenant with his enemy when he was in a position to do God's will, which was to execute him.

Ahab has been in the place where the Allies found themselves with Hitler and his Nazi henchmen at the end of the Second World War; they made peace with any general who wished to surrender their men, but they set out to find and kill all the evil leaders who were guilty of atrocities they could. They had to ensure that the Nazi Party never rose in power again. Mercy could be and was rightly shown to the ordinary people, but all who were active in evil were punished. This is God's way, or evil simply grows again from the stump that is left. Saul made the same error in letting Agag live until Samuel arrived and dealt with the evil man. 1 Samuel 15:3-35.

Verses 35 – 43. In one of the surviving schools of the prophets, 1 Kings 18:3-6, there are a group who have heard of the true prophetic words given to Ahab, and have then seen Ahab get fooled, and one is anointed of the Lord to act in God's name. This anointed prophet asks one of his fellow prophets to strike a blow at him and wound him. He intends to physically act out the foolishness of his king before him and so convict Ahab of his sinful actions.

He asks his friend to strike him in the name of the Lord. His friend doesn't want to injure his colleague, and refuses, even though he knows the purpose. The man who has the anointing to bring the message to Ahab then pronounces a judgement upon the weak prophet who wouldn't do the injuring for the Lord's purpose. He is to be eaten by a lion for this and he is shortly afterwards. This may appear a little harsh, but the point is made clearly to all who would stand for the Lord in such a time; they must be as tough as the pagans are, and tougher! They must be ready to do anything to get the message across and if they are not ready to take extra-ordinary actions, then they are not up to standard for this time in history.

The prophet with the burden of the Lord's message to give finds another man to strike him a blow and he does, and wounds him. The prophet lets the wound bleed and then goes and sits by the road in a place where the king will pass by. It is a testimony to the difficulty there is in getting to speak to this king if you are a prophet of God. Only a disfigured man will get this king's attention. These are days when the king will not welcome the messenger with the word from God. The men of God must go to extreme lengths to just be heard in this day.

The prophet disguises himself as a wounded soldier and waits for the king to come past that way. The king notices him, and that tells us that the blow this prophet is struck with must have caused significant injury, or great loss of blood. This prophet has really laid his life on the line to try to get the message of judgement to this king. He takes his anointing from the Lord seriously. Romans 1:13-23.

He then tells the king a story. The prophet tells a story as if he was a soldier who went into the recent battle, and was given charge of an important prisoner, with a solemn command to hold him and guard him with his life. He says that he got distracted and busy in the battle and the prisoner escaped. Ahab is quick to judge this wounded man and condemn him to immediate death for his failure to exercise the diligence and attention he was tasked with.

At that point the prophet quickly wipes the ashes from his face and stands, and the king sees that he is one of the prophets of the Lord. This tells us that either this man was known personally, or they had some items of dress or style of hair or clothing that set them apart. It was important for this prophet to move quickly at this point, for the king has pronounced death upon him, and the king's guard will be moving towards him to execute him. Execution would have been seconds away.

The speed with which the king acts to try to kill this "wounded soldier" is then contrasted to the slackness with which he failed to judge Ben-Hadad. The prophet makes it clear to the king before his courtiers and Royal Guard, that the Lord had determined Ben-Hadad for death and Ahab has let him go, and so the death penalty is upon him and his people. Ahab does not like rebuke of any sort and Ahab is very annoyed with this message and heads back to his palace in deep anger. It is this refusal to repent and change his ways when rebuked by the Lord that seals this man's fate. He has been warned of the Lord three times, and he has now run out of opportunity to repent; only judgement remains for him.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Mercy has limitations. Determined evil must be judged or the innocent will be murdered later. Genuine repentance must always be responded to with mercy and forgiveness, but the fruit of repentance must be seen and discernment applied lest evil multiply later. We are called to be fruit inspectors before we show mercy to once evil men. Matthew 7:13-23, 18:21-22, Luke 17:3-4. Words may be pretended and deceptive, and believers need to be "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves". Matthew 10:16. Let us be wise and discerning, not wet and foolish like Ahab. There is a time for mercy and there is a time for judgement, and if we get it wrong we will destroy the church and the nation.

2. Evil is to be opposed with all our might. We are to recognise the wiles of the devil and oppose his people in all their various disguises. He is an angel of light and deception is his game. Let us not be tricked by his schemes. Courage is called for, and demanded by the Lord of us. Let us stand for truth and oppose evil. Look up every time in scripture the word "Courage" occurs and be challenged to stand for God's Word with courage, not sit by and let evil mock truth.

3. The prophet is prepared to go to any lengths to get his message across. Let us be encouraged and challenged by this nameless man, who was prepared to be wounded and scarred for the rest of his life to get the truth across to a foolish king who would reject it. Let us be as devoted as this man was to God's truth.

REFLECTION UPON PASTORAL DISCIPLINE

1. Those who will not heed the Word of God within the church are to be first warned and then rebuked (privately if the error is private, or publicly if their error is public). 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Titus 1:13, 14.

2. If they still will not listen to the truth then the individuals are to be isolated from the fellowship and others are to separate themselves from them. 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

3. If they still refuse to change their false views they are to be expelled from the fellowship. Titus 3: 10

There is to be no hesitation at this point nor any exceptions made as false doctrine if not dealt with will effect others; any perversion of the gospel demands drastic action. Galatians 1:6-10.

4. Paul warns about false doctrine 1 Timothy 1:4,11.

Then he expels the two false teachers, Hymeneus, and Alexander, that they might learn the truth and stop blaspheming. 1 Timothy 1:18-20.

5. Any expulsion is only temporary, it applies only so long as the person is involved in heresy, or false practices. When they repent they are to be received back again as was the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32, and the man in adultery who repented in the church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

MERCY

1. The Hebrew and Greek words for mercy carry the meanings of, gentleness, tenderness, and compassion towards others.

2. It is not a passive concern but an active one that works out to help the one in need of love and concern.

3. God is merciful towards us all. Exodus 33:19, Romans 9:15, Isaiah 13:18, Jeremiah 6:23, 21:7, cf. 1 Kings 8:50, Jeremiah 3:13, 42:12

4. God is rich in mercy towards us. Ephesians 2:4, James 5:11, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3.

5. People appealed to the Lord on the basis of his mercy towards the weak and needy. Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30, Mark 10:47, 48, Luke 17:13, 18:38, 39.

6. The good Samaritan's acts were praised by the Lord as acts of mercy. Luke 10:37
7. When the rich man appealed to Abraham in the story of Dives, he appealed on the basis of mercy Luke 16:24.
8. As we are recipients of mercy so we must be merciful to others. Zechariah 7:9, 10, Luke 1:50.
9. Grace gives us that (blessing) which we don't deserve; mercy withholds that (judgement) which we do deserve.

DRINKING ALCOHOL

1. Drunkenness is always condemned as a sin in the Bible. (Proverbs 20:1, 23:20, Isaiah 5:11-22, 28:7, 8, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:11, Ephesians 5:18)
2. Drinking of alcoholic beverages is to be avoided in certain positions of leadership.
 - (a) Kings (rulers, government leaders) (Proverbs 31:4, 5)
 - (b) Pastors (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7)
 - ! Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8)
3. Drinking of alcoholic beverages proved disastrous for certain persons
 - (a) Noah (Genesis 9:21)
 - (b) Nabal (1 Samuel 25:36,37)
 - ! Ephraim (Isaiah 28:1)
 - (d) Lot (Genesis 19:32-6)
4. Drinking of alcoholic beverages is condoned in certain areas. For example:- for medicinal reasons, or where customary with meals, moderate amounts of alcoholic beverages are permissible (Proverbs 31:6-7, 1 Timothy 5:23) Normal cough mixture for instance contains a significant amount of alcohol.
5. It is most possible that the water which Jesus Christ turned into wine was an alcoholic beverage (John 2:1 -11). This passage neither condemns nor condones drinking of alcoholic beverages but was the use of a miracle to focus attention on the person of Jesus Christ as the God-Man-Saviour. Wine produces joy in the heart. (Judges 9:13, Psalm 104:15)
6. Alcoholism forms a part of the pattern of national disaster (Joel 1:4-6, Isaiah 28). It leads to economic depression and encourages military invasion. Jeremiah 13:12-17
7. Adverse effects of excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages:-
 - (a) Leads to impulsive, abusive and irresponsible behaviour, vehicle accidents.
 - (b) Causes paralysis of the eyes (Wernicke's disease), tunnel vision.
 - ! Destroys brain tissue.
 - (d) Produces cirrhosis of the liver,
 - (e) Results in delirium tremens (D.T.'s) which cause confusion, anxiety, terror and delusions. Alcoholism is drug addiction which involves destruction of the soul. (Galatians 5:20-21)
8. Importance of abstinence from alcoholic beverages in youth cannot be over emphasised.
9. Conditions under which indulgence in alcoholic beverage should be avoided from a believer's viewpoint.
 - (a) Application of the law of love – towards believers.
 - (b) Law of expediency – towards unbelievers: used when drinking becomes a false issue in presenting the gospel.
 - ! Law of supreme sacrifice – towards God: applicable when drinking hinders a specific ministry.
 Application – In Australia probably alcohol should be avoided because of major problems, vehicle accidents, social problems. In Greece however, a glass of wine with a meal would be expected and rejection by a Christian could cause a false issue.
10. Drinking is related to degeneracy. Wine and drunkenness are used in the Scripture to represent the entire principle of sublimation involved in rejecting God's way. (Jeremiah 13:12-17)

NOTES

CHAPTER 21**INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter we see the pathetic and murderous weakness of this king Ahab. The murder of Naboth is the last in a long line of stupid and criminal actions by this much warned king. This is a man who has been warned of the Lord again and again, and he has seen the Lord's power and might, and yet he is seduced by love for his evil wife back into paganism and materialism. He needed to have faith that the God of miracles could either change his wife, or provide a godly alternative to her, but he stuck with paganism. He "would not" change, just as the generation of Jesus day "would not" accept him. Matthew 23:37-39.

He has nearly lost his life and his kingdom a number of times, and he has been brought back from the brink by the words of the prophets of God, and the gracious deliverance of the power of God. He ought to have learned that all that matters for man is to serve the Lord his God and walk humbly before Him, but his addictive life patterns have too strong a hold over him. Micah 6:8. Do not feel any sorrow for this man, for he preferred his sexual life with Jezebel to the truth of God from Elijah. He didn't believe he could find a better partner than Jezebel and he knew she wouldn't change her worship, and he chose her rather than God!

The same thing happens with the generation of Jews in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus, for they had seen great miracles, or at least had evidence of their occurrence, and yet they refused to follow him and change their lives. People can know facts and yet refuse to respond to them and make radical life change. Lust filled and lust driven behaviours are hard to break, but they can be if we are desperate enough. We are called to be "desperate" about the things of God and seek them with all our heart. Isaiah 55:6-7, Luke 11:9. We are to "declare war" on bad and destructive behaviours. Let us "put off" our old patterns of behaviours and "put on" the new behaviours that the Holy Spirit leads us into. Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:8-14.

As we enter this chapter, let us examine ourselves in the matter of materialism and the lusts that bind us. Are we addicted to lusts that bind our spirit? Do we find it hard to control our human and earthly desires? Let us walk in the Spirit each day and defeat the lusts of the flesh, lest we end up like Ahab. Romans 7:14-8:2, Hebrews 2:9-15, 2 Peter 1:14. To own things, and possess land and buildings is all temporary, and all we "own" is gone like the wind at our death, or even beforehand. Nothing lasts or has any lasting significance except what we do for the Lord.

Man is urged to consider all things and all decisions in light of eternity, for that is our final destiny, and nothing matters if we lose our eternal soul. Read each of these verses below slowly and reflectively, for they are the heart of the writer's message to us all. Ahab values things, pleasures, land and buildings, and he does not value God's Will, or God's standards. He is seduced by his eyes to the destruction of his family and the kingdom he had received from God.

Deuteronomy 32:28-29, "28. *For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.*
29. *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*"

Psalm 1:4-6, "4. *The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*
5. *Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*
6. *For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*"

Psalm 39:4-5, "4. *LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.*
5. *Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*"

Psalm 90:12, "12. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*"

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10, "7. *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.*
8. *Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.*
9. *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.*
10. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*"

Matthew 16:28, "28. *Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*"

Luke 12:16-23, 35-40, "16. *And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:*
17. *And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?*
18. *And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.*
19. *And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be*

merry.

20. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

22. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.".....

"35. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;

36. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

37. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

38. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

40. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

John 9:4, *"4. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."*

1 Corinthians 3:12-15, *"12. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13. Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

14. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Ephesians 5:15-18. *"15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."

1 KINGS 21:1-29

1 And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. **2** And Ahab spake unto Naboth, 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. **3** And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. **4** And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite 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. **5** But Jezebel 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 Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. **7** And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. **8** So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. **9** And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: **10** And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to 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 Jezebel 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 Naboth on high among the people. **13** And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. **14** Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. **15** And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. **16** And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. **17** And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, **18** Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. **19** And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. **20** And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. **21** Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, **22** And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. **23** And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. **24** Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. **25** 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. 26 And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. The palace that Naboth's vineyard backed onto was the "Summer Palace" that Ahab had ridden to after the confrontation on Mt Carmel with Elijah. 1 Kings 18:42-46. Jezebel is there with him at the palace and he is feeling resentful about the beauty and peace of the vineyard he looks out upon each day and wants it to turn it into a vegetable garden for his people and, possibly his own enjoyment (although I cannot think of this man as a gardener like Prince Charles of England). Keep remembering that he is in the place where the great victory of God through the prophet of God was celebrated. Reflect upon this fact, for it is not great past victories that keep us safe, but presently walking with Jesus and the Spirit in the light of his Word that keeps us safe from sinful temptations.

To look out upon a vineyard is a beautiful view, and there is no need for vegetables to be planted close by the palace, for they travel well, and it's not as if Ahab has to dig them himself and then carry them to the kitchen! This man is a spoilt brat! What he wants he wants and he will not see reason and right, only what he wants. This story not only shows he is callous, it shows he is pathetic and has contempt towards the rights of others. He has fought two great battles and had great victories and yet he is not mature in his attitudes. This is incredible and it underlines the fact that a man who has a weakness and does not deal with it with obedience to the Word of God will not gain from any great experiences he may have.

The other man in the picture is not that bright either! Now he is in the right, and he is a good and noble man, but he does not see the facts that confront him here. Naboth is not a smart man in objecting to the king's desire to take his land and pay a fair price for it, or give him a possibly larger area of land from the royal land bank. This man must know of his king's habits, but he rejects his demand. The argument that this is inviolable land is a Legal one, but facing Ahab it is a weak one, for the land assigned by Joshua could be swapped for other land, and as long as there was Israelite land within that tribal area to be assigned, the family heritage was secure, and the tribal boundaries kept. Naboth is however legally justified to claim the Mosaic Law in his favour here, but it does not forbid what the king asks. Leviticus 25:23-28, Numbers 36:5-9.

Naboth's family may have held the land for five hundred years at this point and so he certainly feels attached to it, but an equal piece, or a superior piece of land is offered and negotiation was preferable to death! This confrontation can only lead to death for him. Fighting over land is always a dumb thing, for the land alone remains, the people do not! The only land we finally need is the patch we are buried in. The entire northern group will lose all their land within 200 years of this time and the survivors of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions will take land wherever they can get it. The ancestral assignment of land under Joshua does not last beyond the 6th century. If we are going to fight to the death over a matter, let's make sure it's worth dying for, and land that could have been swapped for a better and larger piece wasn't worth dying for. Ahab is addicted to sex and power, but Naboth is addicted to things and both will die for their addiction.

Verses 4 – 7. Like all self centred and self absorbed people (Narcissistic) Ahab sulks when he doesn't get his own way. It is unseemly for a man to sulk when he is frustrated, and a sign of great weakness of character. It is a fatal weakness in this man and one that cannot be remedied, for he will not throw himself into the true faith and grow spiritually. There are no short cuts to spiritual growth, and hard slog is required to eliminate these character flaws over time, but the Holy Spirit can always do the job. 2 Peter 3:18.

There is no character flaw that the Holy Spirit cannot sand-paper away with daily walking in the Spirit and moment by moment obedience to the Word. Ephesians 5:16-18 (above). The only way for people to build character and eliminate personality disorders is through systematic spiritual growth in the power of the Holy Spirit over a number of years. Psychology has little to offer such people, but a living and powerful faith has lots to offer.

Ahab is depressed and upset at the refusal of Naboth to sell his vineyard and doesn't eat, he is so upset. This is pathetic for any grown man to behave this way, and shows he has been captured by the spirit of satanic self centred evil. Any believer who behaves this way needs instant correction, never sweet words! This is disgraceful behaviour, but Jezebel will behave even worse than this, and with fatal results for Naboth.

Jezebel is concerned for her husband's mood shift and knows something is eating him up inside. She approaches him in concern and finds out the reason for his temporary depression. This woman is a hedonist and cannot stand anything that disturbs her peace and pleasure, and she will stop at nothing to feel good, even murder. She instantly appeals to his pride and arrogance. "Are you not the king" is a way of also saying, "You can do anything you want". Now while this was true for all pagan kings it was not meant to be true for Israel's kings, for they were meant to hear the Mosaic Law read daily, and they were meant to uphold it. Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

She tells him to rest and recharge and that she will deliver the vineyard to him, and he is not to worry. He leaves the plan in Jezebel's hands. In this he becomes guilty of any action she undertakes on his behalf and in his name. He knows her character and may guess what she is capable of, but he leaves all things in her hands and rests confident that the land

will be delivered to him, and he won't ask any questions about where Naboth is. He is solely fixated on getting his own way; he cares not for the rights of others. Proverbs 1:10-19, 3:31-35, Micah 2:1-3, 7:1-5.

Verses 8 – 14. Jezebel knows enough of the Mosaic Law to know that two witnesses are required to condemn a man, and she selects two evil men who will lie before the court to secure Naboth's condemnation. She writes under Ahab's signature and seal so that the elders of the neighbouring town to the palace believe they are receiving a letter from the king himself, and they will not want to question it too thoroughly. It is what we call today "a set up", and it will see Naboth condemned falsely, executed, and then his family thrown from their ancestral home to the mercy of the wolves. It is done with consummate cruelty and with revenge and sheer lust as the motives.

Jezebel ensures that the feast makes Naboth relax and feel special. He is lifted up in honour and then at the point of his exultation the two evil men come forward and he finds himself condemned before the entire community. Imagine the shame, shock and horror for his family members, who watch their husband and father lifted up and then cast down and murdered. Remember this level of malice pastors, for this is the evil that drives satanic servants. James 4:7-10, 1 Peter 5:8-9.

They seek the humiliation of God's servants, and they enjoy playing with them before they destroy them. They have no mercy in them, yet they seek it from others for themselves. This is why the Lord orders their judgement, and whenever such people enter the church to do mischief, you are to spot them quickly and eliminate them from the fellowship quickly. 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 1 John 4:1, 2 John 7-11, 3 John 9-11.

Verses 15 – 16. The two evil men report that Naboth is dead to Jezebel and she calmly and with a smile on her face goes into her husband's room to deliver the "good news" that he now owns the vineyard. Ahab is still sulking and moaning upon his bed and she has to tell him to "arise". This man has been so self centred that he has allowed his wife to murder a good, if foolish man, and dispossess his family from land they have held for five hundred years, and all he will care about is enjoying his stolen land. Moral and character weaknesses open the door to great evil. This is why the qualifications for leadership in the church are all moral and character traits, and this is why great care must be taken to ensure that none gain power or authority without these Holy Spirit controlled traits. 1 Timothy 3:2-13, Titus 1:5-16.

Jezebel gloats that the man who opposed the king is now dead. She emphasises the fact that Naboth refused to sell to the king, and by doing this we can be sure that was at the heart of Ahab's sadness and frustration. For someone to refuse to do what he wanted them to do was just too much for this self centred and pride filled man. As soon as he knows Naboth is dead he rises from bed and heads down to the vineyard to enjoy his ill gotten gains. This is one of the hardest things to accept about evil people; that they have no conscience at all.

Many believers, and even experienced pastors, are still surprised at this. Don't be surprised, just review the biblical teaching on Satan's strategies and tactics, for he specialises in deadening the hearts of men to the truth. Romans 1:28-32, Ephesians 2:1-6, Colossians 2:12-13, 2 Peter 2:15.

Verses 17 – 19. Elijah now re-enters the picture. Did all the above occur while he was still in Horeb or on his journey back? We don't know whether this is the case, but it may be that in Elijah's absence the Lord used others, or that he simply set Elijah aside, and used the other prophets to expand their ministry and underline to Ahab that it was not just Elijah who stood for the Lord. Our job as servants of the Lord is to rejoice in the ministries of others rather than be threatened by them, for we all serve the Lord.

The desire of a true minister is that he be replaced by many of his disciples. The goal of ministry is multiplication. For whatever the reason, it is Elijah who finally receives the call to go and deliver the judgement to Ahab. This is a dangerous mission and the Lord will normally assign the senior man of God to such a task. As you mature in the work of the Lord be ready to face more and more difficult tasks. Increasing difficulty and danger in mission work is not a sign of God's judgement, but of God's favour and blessing.

Elijah's words to Ahab are powerful and direct. The Lord refers to the vineyard as belonging to Naboth, not Ahab, for theft does not change ownership in God's eyes. The words of Elijah are to be the words of the Lord to Ahab. He is accused of the murder, for it was done in his name, and with his open permission to his wife to work her evil. God holds Ahab responsible with his wife. He is told that he will die and bleed in exactly the same spot that Naboth bled to death. Elijah is clear on the message and he will walk past the very spot to deliver it, and he knows the likely reception he will receive. The king's joy at the end of the drought is well and truly over, for his wife has worked her poison and the king now hates the prophet. Note the way he greets the prophet in the next verse.

Verses 20 – 22. We see in the greeting of Elijah by Ahab the reason why the prophet could not go to Ahab when Jezebel threatened him. 1 Kings 19:2-3. This king sees the words of God as judgement and he hates the messenger. Be ready for this response by determined and evil men. Those who hate the truth will hate the messenger of the truth. Matthew 10:16-18, 23:29-39, Luke 6:22-23, John 15:18-21, Galatians 4:16, 1 John 3:13-15. Elijah tells the king that he is found by God for conviction because he has "sold himself to work evil in the sight of God".

The king is reminded that all things he has done are in "the sight of God". As he has brought evil upon others so evil will come upon him, for as he has judged, so he will be judged. Matthew 7:1-5. All the men in his household will die as a result of their father's evil. His sons will not survive him and sit upon the throne. These are not youngsters, so do not feel

the Lord is being unfair here. Ahab has ruled for over twenty years by this point and his sons are in their late teens at least, and sadly they follow their mother and father in evil and so fall under the judgement. Exodus 20:3-6.

Verses 23 – 26. While Ahab has been told that the dogs will lick his blood the punishment upon Jezebel is even more awful, for the dogs will eat her against the wall of the city palace. The formal pronouncement of judgement upon all who follow Ahab then follows. Those who die in the cities will the dogs eat and those who fall in the fields will the birds of prey eat. It is a metaphor for military disaster and the later total defeat of his army.

The writer then adds his own observation as a historian, that there were none as bad as this man in Israel, who followed after the worship of the pagan gods with such passionate devotion. This man had received so many warnings, but the satanic blindness that he had allowed to get hold of his soul was so deep he never repented thoroughly enough to be freed of it. Ephesians 2:1-6.

This man could have been saved, but his repentance never led to his acceptance of the Lord as his Lord and God. He knew the truth, and believed it was true, and he paid lip service to it, but he never let the truth get hold of him. He had the faith of the devils in the truth. James 2:19. He had his life cleaned up at times but never replaced the pagan gods in his inner soul with the Lord. Matthew 16:26, Luke 12:19-20.

Jesus told a parable of just such a man. Matthew 12:43-45, Luke 11:21-26. It is another reminder that the gospel of so called "easy believism" is no gospel at all, and that faith without evidence in the life of genuine Holy Spirit change is no saving faith at all! This man is in hell today, and all who think they can play with the truth, and not fully commit to it, will join him one day. We are either sold out for the truth, or we have sold out to evil.

Verses 27 – 29. He truly repents now of his evil, or does he just feel sorry for himself? The lord takes his sadness seriously this time, so the sorrow must have been genuine, and he has the penalty commuted a little, so that the kingdom is lost to the next generation not to him. He does not appear to be saved however, and the absence of any actions for righteousness speaks volumes regarding this fact. He still does not reject the pagan gods, nor deal with the evil of his wife, nor correct his sons and recall the family and nation to the truth, and so I cannot see this man being genuinely saved. James 2:14-26.

I may be surprised in heaven by meeting this man, but I doubt it. He was sorry that he was caught out in sin and evil, but there was no fruit of repentance in his life. He humbled himself before the Lord in fear and sadness at what will happen to him, but he does not serve the Lord and accept the Lord's rulership over his life and his kingdom. He is so close to salvation, and yet so far away! This is the tragedy of so many amongst modern men.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. All that matters in this life are the things that we have done for the Lord. What is of eternal significance is alone of significance. All else is fluff and chaff, and will be blown away by the winds of time. Matthew 3:8-12. Let us labour for the rewards that last eternally, not agonise over things that do not matter eternally.
2. Character weaknesses must be addressed within us all. Each of us has Old Sin Nature weaknesses and they must be worked upon through the Holy Spirit's daily teaching ministry with us by means of the Word of God. Spiritual growth will always lead to the controlling of our Old Sin Nature, and this growth in self control is essential for all who would have leadership roles. None are ever to be appointed to leadership roles without Holy Spirit controlled lives.
3. Let us not be surprised by the hatred of evil men for so they hated the prophets before us. Let us focus upon the "well done" of the Lord, seeking his eternal approval, rather than the temporary praise of condemned men. Let us give the real and full gospel message, not the truncated "easy believism" gospel of some American evangelists.
4. It is not enough for people to affirm a truth, they must wholeheartedly commit to the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. Let us not be responsible for any misunderstanding amongst men regarding this. It is not enough for men to just "affirm truth", for the devils can do this, and they tremble at it. We must always do more than the devils to affirm our faith is real.

REFLECTION UPON ETERNAL REWARDS AND CROWNS

1. Rewards and Salvation are carefully separated in the scriptures. Salvation is a free gift from God, rewards are for meritorious service in the power of the Spirit.
2. Salvation – a free gift to the lost (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 6:23, John 4:10), an everlasting possession (John 3:36, John 5:24, John 6:47).
3. Rewards – to the saved who faithfully work for the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:24, 25, Revelation 22:12), distributed at the Judgement Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 14:10), which takes place after the Rapture of the Church (Revelation 19:7,8).
4. Rewards are often pictured in the form of crowns:-
 - a) The incorruptible crown – for faithfulness in exercising self control (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

- b) The crown of glory – for faithfulness in suffering (1 Peter 5:4).
 - c) The crown of life – for faithfulness under trial (James 1:12, Revelation 2:10).
 - d) The crown of righteousness – for faithful testimony (2 Timothy 4:8).
 - e) The crown of rejoicing – for faithful service (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20, Philippians 4:1).
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- 5. Rewards come after you have entered into the Plan of God through regeneration
 - 6. Rewards are based on the use of divine operating assets including the filling of the Holy Spirit
 - 7. You can lose rewards but never salvation (1 Corinthians 3:14-15, 2 Timothy 2:12,13)

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

The time finally comes for the judgement of God upon evil men, but the day of doom for Ahab arrives after three further full years of grace for him. He has had maximum time to turn his sorrow at his past sin into genuine and lasting repentance, but he has not done this. There has been a godly king in Judah, Jehoshaphat, and this man stands for the Lord, but he foolishly joins together with Ahab at this very end time for Ahab, in a venture that is doomed. As a believer he has no business joining together with such an unbelieving pagan as Ahab. Ahab's sorrow at the judgement of Elijah upon him may have fooled Jehoshaphat into thinking he had truly changed, but events will prove otherwise.

Ahab tries to join with Jehoshaphat to achieve a victory over Syria that would not have been necessary had he finished off the evil Ben-Hadad as he should have. The false application of mercy in that case now comes home to roost for Ahab, and his own hatred of the truth will be the means for his own death. The phoney war with Syria is over and the real war begins. He does not seek the guidance of the godly prophet Elijah, nor the other godly prophet Micaiah, (until he is forced to), and this is another sad sign that this man has not repented fully at all of his past evil. This man has not repented and restored true religion, or he would be fellowshiping with the true prophets of God and he would not fear their words as he does.

This chapter reminds us all that the Lord does judge the lost, and he does so with violence at times, but only after all means of grace have been exhausted. This evil man and his evil wife are worthy of death, and have been for some time, and they have walked away from every opportunity to be saved. Judgement is God's strange work, and he prefers salvation to judgement, but finally it is the man who by persistent evil decides what will happen to him. Isaiah 28:21, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 20:11-15.

There is great sadness here, for the death of the lost is the final end for them, and we feel the power of the Lord's words over Jerusalem. Luke 13:33-35. The lost have no hope because they have walked away from hope, but our sadness for them must not debilitate us as we move forward away from their bodies. They have made their call, and we must leave them with their eternal choice, no matter how painful it is for us to see a friend drop into Hell.

1 KINGS 22:1-53

1 And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. 2 And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3 And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? 4 And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramothgilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. 5 And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 7 And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? 8 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 9 Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. 10 And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. 12 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand. 13 And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. 14 And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak. 15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD? 17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. 18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? 19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. 20 And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. 24 But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? 25 And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. 26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; 27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. 28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you. 29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramothgilead. 30 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle. 31 But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. 32 And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 34 And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. 35 And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. 36 And there went a proclamation throughout the host about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country. 37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. 38 And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake. 39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 40 So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead. 41 And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42 Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43 And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. 44 And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. 45 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 46 And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land. 47 There was then no king in Edom: a deputy was king. 48 Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Eziongeber. 49 Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not. 50 And

Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 51 Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. 52 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin: 53 For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. The book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel is now lost, but the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah is our book of 2 Chronicles, and the parallel passage for this chapter before us is 2 Chronicles 18:1ff. The doctrine of Separation is not a popular one today and some feel it is unscriptural to withdraw from people, but it is actually commanded in some cases. We cannot be blessed if we are walking with a man who is under the curse and judgement of God.

This king of Judah is condemned by his own prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, on his return for his joining with this pagan king of Israel. 2 Chronicles 19:1-4. We must get as far away from such people as possible. We are to meet with and fellowship with the lost only until we have given them the gospel message, and they have fully and finally rejected it, then we are to leave and shake the very dust of their dwelling off our feet. This is a command of the Lord himself, and was apostolic practise. Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11, Luke 9:5, 10:11, Acts 13:51.

Jehoshaphat takes the initiative to approach Ahab for an alliance. He may have been seeking lasting peace, but that should have been sought through spiritual means, not alliance with an evil man whose word and deeds could not be trusted. He mentions the key city of Ramoth Gilead. This was a city of refuge from the days of Joshua and an important and strategic East bank town. It should not be held by Syria after the defeat of the Syrian king three years before, but Ahab's weakness has led to it being held still. He trusted the words of Ben-hadad to return the cities taken, and of course, the words of an evil man cannot be trusted. 1 Kings 20:34.

The king of Judah commits to unity in the bond of their common brotherhood as family of Israel, but their brotherhood is now only skin deep, for the northern peoples are mostly pagan, and their unity is broken as a result. He makes a commitment that he ought not to make before he hears from the Lord. He asks for a word from a prophet of the Lord after his commitment rather than before it. It is always a good practise when asked to commit to any venture to pray about it and get back to the person when you are sure of the Lord's plan for you.

The means to inquire of the Lord was well spelled out by Moses to Joshua and had been passed to the people of Israel in the Mosaic Law, and had been practised by David and all the godly kings. Numbers 27:18-23, Joshua 9:14, 1 Samuel 14:18, 23:2, 4, 9-12, 30:8. There was no need to inquire of Ahab and his fake prophets, the right thing to do was for both kings to head down the road to Jerusalem and seek counsel at the Temple of Solomon of the High Priest there. Jehoshaphat does not want to provoke a spiritual crisis with Ahab over this and so doesn't ask him to do this, but this was the issue; the nation needed to be unified by true worship not political manoeuvring.

Verses 6 – 12. The first thing to note is the number of the prophets. We have been previously told that there were only 100 prophets saved from the persecution of Jezebel. 1 Kings 18:3-6. This is only a few years later and there have not been the passing of the required years for the numbers to swell naturally to 400 real prophets. This number is suspiciously identical to the prophets of the grove who ate at Jezebel's table. 1 Kings 18:19. They appear to have escaped the judgement on Mt Carmel, and may have been re-branded by Jezebel, and may re-emerge here as if they are prophets of the Lord. Their behaviour is that of the prophets of Baal upon Carmel. 1 Kings 18:26ff. They are not acting as the calm and secure prophets of the Lord have acted. They lack the self assured and determined nature of Elijah.

Jehoshaphat "smells a rat", or rather he smells 400 rats! He asks for a real prophet of the Lord to be enquired of regarding the battle that is to come. Now Elijah appears to be still alive and he isn't even mentioned, but another man is, by the name of Micaiah. This man has clearly been busy in ministry to the king, but the king "hates" him, as he does not bring happy messages to the king, but messages of truth and judgement. The true prophet is sent for and while the two kings wait for him to come the 400 fakes play their pseudo-spiritual games in front of them.

One false prophet is named, and his name is a Hebrew one, Zedekiah. It is a sobering reminder that these are men with Hebrew names and godly ancestry, that refer to God, but their belief system is compromised by their paganism. This is the biggest shock to many young believers; they expect people with godly heritages to be godly, but they are not necessarily godly at all. We must take the Lord's instructions regarding testing all prophets seriously.

Read carefully through Matthew 7:13-29, and note that the testing of prophets is to examine their fruit, not just their words. Have the prophet's words and the fruit of their lives been holy and true? Have they told truth before, or are they proved false by their previous false so called "prophetic words". Most people who have claimed the name prophet have been false through history. God doesn't need many prophets, for the Word of God is clear and mostly sufficient, and a prophet is only needed very occasionally to correct, challenge and bring warning to those who are ignoring the Word of God.

Notice the drama that this false prophet acts out in front of the kings. It's all very dramatic and pictorial and it's all rubbish! Time will prove these men false and the death penalty was called for in such cases. Deuteronomy 13:1-11, 18:15-22.

Verses 13 – 17. The messenger that is sent to bring up Micaiah to the gathering gives him the “public policy briefing”, and he is told clearly to give the right message, and in case he has any doubts, he is told what the king believes the “right message” is. Having been warned, he enters, and the kings request his ruling also. Does he back the 400 prophets or does he stand with a minority voice?

It is interesting to note that through history the truth has nearly always been a minority voice; God's people have nearly always been outnumbered by the false words of satanic or stupid prophets! Many of today's prophets are not satanic, most are just arrogant, and they foolishly believe they have gifts they don't have. We have people today teaching other people how to be prophets with no reference to the Holy Spirit except to use His name as a rubber stamp to their theories! These people are foolish lying prophets but not necessarily satanically inspired.

Micaiah is a genuine prophet and gives us a good snap shot of the real over against the fakes. Micaiah is absolutely straight with the messenger, and makes it clear to him that he will give the words of God, not the words of man, whatever the king wants to hear. The trap that this king has fallen into all his life has been this one. He seeks answers that suit him to all questions he asks. He has sought a religion that pleases him rather than challenges him to moral strength. He has taken the easy road and will not hear correction. Matthew 7:13-14.

Micaiah enters the flat area in front of the two thrones and all eyes are on him. The 400 false prophets are there observing as he walks alone into the open space. It is another reminder to us that God's servants need to be able to stand alone and face the hostile mob with their eyes fixed upon the Lord alone. Matthew 6:25-27, 10:14-25. In ministry if you need the physical or emotional support of others you have not matured enough to serve in difficult places; just keep walking in the Spirit and learning to trust the Lord more and more. If you need lots of fellowship with others to be spiritually strong then you cannot yet serve as a Micaiah or an Elijah.

King Ahab asks the question to Micaiah and without any hesitation he speaks the answer that the king wants to hear straight back to him. The sarcasm is not lost on the king and he asks for the real truth. It is almost as if he knows that the truth is the opposite from what he has heard, but he wants to believe that the good news is the truth. Micaiah now replies with the vision the Lord has given him. He reports that he sees the armies of Israel scattered upon the hills with their officers gone and the Lord's instruction for them all to return to their homes, for there is nothing more that they can do. He sees a total and devastating defeat of the armies of Israel and Judah, yet the armies are able to return to their homes in peace and the majority do survive death.

Verses 18 – 23. The response of King Ahab is further evidence that his “repentance” recorded in the previous chapter has been temporary, and his life change not thorough at all, if any life change has occurred. This man hates the truth and those who tell it. Jehoshaphat has no business sitting next to this man but he stays there. Micaiah now tells the kings his next vision, and it is a vision of the real king of the universe sitting upon his throne. As these two kings are surrounded by their courtiers and the false prophets, the throne of heaven is surrounded by the heavenly host of angels; both elect and fallen (at this point).

Micaiah then reports the conversation of God regarding the fate of Ahab, indicating that he will be fooled by his own false religious system into falling in battle at Ramoth-Gilead. Ahab is now being judged, but he has forgotten the words of the prophet and is now back in his careless ways, thinking that God will never get around to bringing judgement upon him. It is this self delusion that destroys all unbelievers in the end.

The Lord has graciously waited for three years for this man's repentance to go deep enough to produce genuine life change, and this man has gone the other way. He has returned to his old ways and hates the truth without any just cause. All he had to do was return to the God of his fathers and worship in truth, but he has stayed with his evil wife and her crooked faith. Now my tough comment here raises an important question. Should believers finally leave their pagan life partners through issues of faith? The answer is “yes”, if the partner will not let them practise their faith in truth. 1 Corinthians 7:12-17.

The false prophets have prophesied by a “lying spirit”. Now this raises another question; is this angelic being a lying elect angel from God? The answer is probably “no”, for it is a spirit who lies by nature, and the only one who does this is Satan. He is still required to obey the Lord and do the Lord's bidding at times with his own people. Job 1:6-12. Do not forget that Satan is a creature, and he is unable to resist the Lord's orders, and must accept His rulings, and finally will have to accept his punishment. Revelation 20:10.

Verses 24 – 28. False prophets do not like to be nailed in their arrogance. Zedekiah approaches Micaiah and slaps him on the cheek. He makes a sarcastic comment as he strikes the true prophet, and Micaiah answers him directly and strongly, that he will know the truth when he tries to hide from enemy soldiers hunting him in his own house. Ahab then orders Micaiah to be arrested and taken into the jail of Samaria where he is to be left to die of starvation. (To be jailed meant death, good food was never provided for a prisoner). He is handed over to the king's son Joash as his jailer. He is to be fed and given water, but the most basic and filthy sort until the king returns in triumph from the wars. Micaiah quite rightly identifies that if the king returns in triumph then he is not a prophet and deserves to die in jail.

Remember the two key passages relating to the gift and office of prophet. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:9-22. If any prophet was proven to speak nonsense then that prophet wasn't to be sent back to school, he or she was to be executed. Prophets may learn the scriptures in the "school of the prophets", but they did not speak in the Lord's name until they were absolutely sure of it, for to get the message wrong once was to be executed!

Verses 29 – 34. Foolishly the king of Judah joins the king of Israel in the attack upon Ramoth-Gilead. He has placed his trust in lying words and will nearly lose his army and his life. The two armies join together as one, and such combinations, unless well tested in the field first, are flawed and vulnerable. It takes time for old enemies to learn to work and manoeuvre well together. This weakness is able to be exploited by Ben-Hadad, whose strategic plan is worthy of Sun Tzu himself. This is the third great battle he has fought against Ahab and this time he assigns his key unit to try to kill the king of Israel and no-one else.

The great Chinese general and military strategist Sun Tzu, who wrote "The Art of War" around 500 BC, identified that the best thing you can do in any battle is try to kill the enemy's key leadership. Ben-Hadad believes Ahab is a lucky king, for he has defeated him twice when he shouldn't have won, and so his elimination, Ben-Hadad believes, will secure the victory for Syria. Ahab has intelligence about this and tries to get Jehoshaphat killed in his place by dressing the king of Judah in his own armour! What a great ally this evil man is! With friends like Ahab your enemies are multiplied!

Ahab is however a brave man in battle and he has proved that. His weakness does not go onto the battle field, and even when he is mortally wounded by the arrow he remains upright in his chariot to encourage his men. He has nobility in him as a soldier, but not as a man. He does not die as a believer under DYING GRACE, but as a stubborn and stupid pagan, and Jehoshaphat nearly dies with him, and he will be given more time to repent by God's grace, but will fail to.

The entire armoured forces of Syria (their chariot forces) are focused upon seizing Ahab and killing him. Thirty two officers with their chariots are given the task of pushing through the lines to kill Ahab, and they see the foolish king of Judah wearing Ahab's robes and they turn and attack the line with all their chariots and press towards Jehoshaphat. He sees what is happening and cries aloud, casts off Ahab's "death seeking robes", and moves to another part of the field, and the chariots peel off to seek another target. The fact that the chariots of the Syrians are able to do this tells us that the line of the Israelites is broken and they are being cut down at will by their enemy. The battle is now lost.

The death of Ahab is the result of a random arrow. How does the writer know this? Well, no Syrian takes any credit for killing the king by this bow shot, and given the likely reward posted, if any archer had known his arrow killed the king he would have claimed the reward. This is an archer who has one arrow left and points his bow in the general direction of a group of Israelites and lets the arrow go. It enters Ahab's body at a joint between the armour plating and mortally wounds him.

Verses 35 – 38. The battle surges to and fro and the lines are broken. It is man against man now and the Israelites are being killed in greater numbers than the Syrians. The battle is fought all through the day, and the king remains upright in his chariot encouraging his men until the sun sets and the two armies disengage exhausted and head back to their camps. The Israelites all head home, for their king is dead. The message is given to the armies of the Israelites and all the men of Judah and Israel head for their walled cities.

Ahab's wound has been fatal, leading to steady bleeding. He dies of blood loss, as does Richard the Lion Heart of England of a wound in the same place. All through that night the men of the combined armies head home along the roads to their cities, and Ahab's chariot carries his body back to Samaria. They arrive the next day and his armour is washed in the very spot where Micaiah said his blood would be spilled upon the ground.

Verses 39 – 44. Ahab loved fine buildings and had built an "Ivory Palace" in Samaria, besides many other buildings also. Had he put equal emphasis upon spiritual things, and eliminated his evil wife, he would have ruled longer and been blessed by the Lord. His death is described as "sleeping with his fathers". Now this raises the issue of where does the soul go after death? Is there such a thing as "soul sleep"? Is it right to say that the dead sleep, and so write RIP (rest in peace) upon tomb stones?

This man is buried with his pagan ancestors and he will be raised with them on the last day to the same judgement. He was a son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he walked away from the godly heritage he had and followed after his wife's paganism. Sadly his son Ahaziah follows his mother's example also. He does not rest in peace, any more than any unbeliever does. The parable that Jesus tells answers all these things, and reminds us that a millisecond after death each person is face to face with their judgement. Isaiah 14:9-11, Luke 16:19-31.

Ahab is compared to his contemporary Jehoshaphat, and the king of Judah although foolish in this brief alliance with Ahab, has followed the ways of God, but did not thoroughly eliminate idolatry from the land. It may be this fact that gives the clue to his acceptance of Ahab. He may not have seen idolatry to be as evil as it is, and so was tolerant towards Ahab rather than truly assessing his real spiritual state. There is great danger in all toleration of evil systems.

Verses 45 – 50. Jehoshaphat's additional history is recorded in 2 Chronicles 18-20. Jehoshaphat does not learn his lesson about Separation from pagans and also allies himself with Ahaziah as he did with Ahab but the Lord over rules the alliance and it falls apart. The Lord brings disaster upon their joint trading venture from Ezion Geber to ensure that the alliance breaks up without too many casualties this time. Without repentance and restoration of the true religion in the north there can be no joining together of the two peoples again.

One act of Jehoshaphat is mentioned as being praise worthy above others however, and that was the execution of all the sodomites in the land. Now this is not just an elimination of the homosexuals, but the elimination of their pagan Canaanite type religion also. In my clinical practise I have had to work with many homosexuals with many different problems, but I have been staggered at the predominance of pagan elements in the life style of many of them. Some are wonderful people and I will assist all who come for assistance in truth and agape concern for them, but without any condoning of their life style.

The homosexual life style in Australasia is presently associated with massive amounts of drug taking, and at their "rave parties" pagan elements are very dominant in the Homosexual Community. Nothing has changed in the satanic arsenal, for he knows the heart of man, and he knows that when men and women leave the path of God they are open to the same evils they have been from the beginning of man's rebellion in the days of Cain. Romans 1:18-32.

Verses 51 – 53. Ahaziah rules only two years in Samaria before the judgement of God falls upon him. He is judged because he follows all the evils of his mother, and Jeroboam before him. God gives him two years to repent, but he plunges deeper and deeper into the evils of the Baal worship type of paganism. His father had seen the prophets of Baal destroyed on Mt Carmel, but in the three years after that time Jezebel has re-seeded the land with the evils of her home town religion. Her son follows her to his own death as we will see in the next book.

Unless evil is thoroughly eliminated it will always return in greater power. Pastor, you must recognise the thoroughness with which evil people must be eliminated from leadership positions in the church. Satan's main assaults upon churches will always be to seed his false prophets and teachers at the heart of the church leadership teams. These people must be identified, warned, and expelled if they persist in evil. Matthew 7:15-20, 16:1-4.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us be really scared of being in the company of false prophets and false brethren. False teachers have always been in the majority, and we should be ready to practise discernment whenever anyone claims to be speaking for the Lord. Let us be "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves", as the Lord orders us to be. That means being good fruit inspectors of the lives of those who claim to speak the truth of God. Matthew 7:1ff. The doctrine of Separation must be applied at all times or the believer will be led astray into paths that bring judgement upon them. Whenever Satan's people enter the church we must spot them quickly and challenge them to repentance, and when they refuse to change, eliminate them from the fellowship quickly.

2. True unity between people is spiritual not political. The people who are your brothers and sisters are not those with whom you share genetics, but those with whom you share a Saviour. Psalms 69:8, Matthew 12:46-50, John 7:3-5. Let us build our social and family networks as believers with those who love the Lord in spirit and in truth. Do not be overwhelmed by sadness when you need to move away from old neighbours and family members because of their paganism. Just recognise the truth of their choices and make your own choices strongly for truth and righteousness.

3. Spiritual revival is required cyclically for all churches. Expect the enemy to try to debilitate the church by distractions from the true path, and distortions of the truth. Preach the truth with power and focused energy. Do not ever stop powerful biblical preaching, for that alone lets the Holy Spirit loose upon the people of God, and the Holy Spirit through the Word of God will sort people out quickly.

4. Let the reaction of people to the preaching of the Word of God sort out the true from the false. War must be constantly declared upon false teachers and prophets and constant vigilance is required for all churches to guard their leadership teams from the satanic infiltrators who will be sent at times to destroy the spiritual life of the church. If in doubt operate on the basis of demon possession and in the name of "The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of all lords", require the demon to leave.

Notes