

**Elijah, 1 Kings 17-18. Augusta. October- November 2011. (1) Reading : 1 Kings 16. 29-33; 17. 1-3.**

As most, if not all of you know, for the majority of the time I am with you, I plan to look with you at the life of Elijah as recorded for us in chapters 17 and 18 of the First Book of Kings.

I guess we would all regard the incident on Mount Carmel in the latter section of chapter 18 as the great – and decisive – confrontation between Jehovah and Ba'al – when the Lord established His supremacy by fire from heaven. And so it was! But I want to look with you first at 1 Kings 17 and to see that it was really *there* that the battle was joined, and that it was *there* that the Lord set about discrediting the claims made for Ba'al by his many followers, and demonstrating that He – the Lord – and only He – was the true and living God.<sup>1</sup>

But, by way of background, our reading this evening comes largely from 1 Kings 16, commencing at verse 29 ...

**[Read 1 Kings 16. 29-33; 17. 1-3]**

At the end of chapter 16, things looked – and were – very bleak for the northern kingdom of Israel. The spiritual condition of the nation was at an all time low. The 70 years or so since the division of the kingdom in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam had been a period of steady and sad decline.<sup>2</sup> Israel's seven kings so far had – without exception – been bad, but the latest king – Ahab – was *by far* the worst. I understand that, when we come into chapter 17, Ahab had been reigning some 14-15 years,<sup>3</sup> and the idolatrous and apostate conditions described in the closing section of chapter 16 had taken firm root. This was *beyond doubt* Israel's 'darkest hour' to date.<sup>4</sup>

As I view him, Ahab was a fairly complex character. On the one hand, there is no question but that Ahab actually *hated* the Lord – certainly 'the Lord' who Elijah worshipped. 2 Chronicles 19 tells us that 'Jehu the son of Hanani the seer (the prophet, that is) went out to meet (King) Jehoshaphat (of Judah), and said to him (referring to Ahab), Should you help the *wicked*, and love those *who hate the Lord*?<sup>5</sup>

And I note that the Holy Spirit's comments about Ahab at the end of chapter 16 are enclosed between two bookends – positioned at verses 30 and 33 : '*Ahab*', we read in verse 30, 'did evil in the sight of the Lord, *more than all who were before him*' ... and, in verse 33, that '*Ahab* did *more* to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger *than all* the kings of Israel *who were before him*'.<sup>6</sup> Between these bookends, we are told that 'he went and served Ba'al and worshipped him. He set up an altar for Ba'al in the house (or temple) of Ba'al, which he had built in Samaria'<sup>7</sup> (which we learn from 2 Kings 10 was a very large temple<sup>8</sup>) – and the fact that Ahab built such a temple for Ba'al in Israel's new capital city (in obvious competition with the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem) suggests strongly that Ahab was determined to install the worship of Ba'al as the state religion of Israel.<sup>9</sup>

The closing section of chapter 16 tells us that the sins of both Ahab and his father Omri exceeded the sins of all the kings who had preceded them.<sup>10</sup> Omri had gone further than any of his predecessors in the matter of the calf-worship introduced by Jeroboam<sup>11</sup> - which in itself is regarded by scripture as extremely serious, receiving mention no less than 19 times in the books of Kings.<sup>12</sup> But if Omri had been rated the extreme form of evil to date, this award was wrenched from him and handed to his son. For, 'as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in' the ways of Jeroboam and Omri, Ahab was responsible for introducing Ba'al worship into Israel wholesale – causing the sins of his father to seem mild by comparison to his own. It was Ba'al worship then which engraved Ahab's name at the head of the monument of apostasy.

And yet, on other hand, in chapter 22, Ahab was quite willing to consult the nominal prophets *of the Lord* before he went out to battle against the Syrians. In response to the request of king Jehoshaphat, we are told that he enquired 'at the word of the Lord'.<sup>13</sup> And, remarkably, in spite of Jezebel, he gave to each of his three children names structured around the name, not 'Ba'al', but 'Jehovah' – namely, Ahaziah ('Jehovah has taken hold', possibly 'Jehovah sustains'),<sup>14</sup> Jehoram ('Jehovah is high'),<sup>15</sup> and Athaliah (possibly meaning 'Jehovah is exalted' or 'afflicted of Jehovah')<sup>16</sup> – though Athaliah, when Queen of Judah, followed faithfully in her mother's steps – serving Ba'al as zealously, and as murderously, in Judah as Jezebel did in Israel.<sup>17</sup>

Religiously then Ahab was a curious mixture. Seemingly he had much in common with the successors to Israel's land – the Samaritans – of whom we read in 2 Kings 17, that they 'feared Jehovah, and served their own gods'.<sup>18</sup>

I can only conclude that religion wasn't Ahab's strong point – and we are specifically told that, in his idolatrous ways, he was 'stirred up' – incited – urged on – by his wife Jezebel<sup>19</sup> ... whose influence for evil he did nothing, alas, to suppress – as required by God's law.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence is that Ahab's *main interests in life* lay with such earthly and mundane matters as his horses and mules<sup>21</sup> ... his planned herb or vegetable garden<sup>22</sup> ... and his many construction projects – including the fortification of Samaria, and the building of many other cities, together with his luxurious 'house of ivory', as it called in chapter 22, within which archaeologists have found 200 ivory figures, plaques and decorations.<sup>23</sup>

We learn from chapter 18 that Ahab was present himself on Mount Carmel,<sup>24</sup> and I suspect that Elijah's question then, 'How long do you halt (limp) between two opinions'<sup>25</sup> ... possibly, 'how long will you limp – how long will you hobble – on two crutches' ... was as much a word to Ahab *personally* as it was to Ahab's people *generally*.

But Ahab's wife Jezebel was a very different kettle of fish – being made of much tougher and sterner stuff than he ever was.<sup>26</sup> International courtesy required that a foreign queen – such as earlier the foreign wives of Solomon had been, and now this Phoenician princess had become – that a foreign queen should have a sanctuary of her own religion in her adopted country.<sup>27</sup> But it wasn't in Jezebel to be content to practise her faith privately within the confines of some palace chapel – not Jezebel! She was a true and worthy daughter of Ethba'al (IttoBa'al I) – a particularly nasty piece of work – who, according to Flavius Josephus (the Jewish historian), was not only king of Tyre and Sidon<sup>28</sup> – having gained the throne by murder – but also a priest of Astarte<sup>29</sup> – probably to be identified with Asherah (ASH-ER-AH),<sup>30</sup> the principal goddess of Tyre and Sidon,<sup>31</sup> who functioned, seemingly, as both mother and consort of Ba'al.<sup>32</sup> And Jezebel had a great deal of her father's blood in her.

Nor was she content that Ba'al-worship should co-exist with Jehovah-worship in Israel.<sup>33</sup> She was determined to displace and stamp out all forms of Jehovah-worship, and to that end, she had her own missionary society – 450 prophets of Ba'al and 400 prophets of Asherah – all of whom, according to chapter 18 verse 19, enjoyed her royal patronage, hospitality and support.<sup>34</sup> When it says that these prophets ate 'at Jezebel's table'<sup>35</sup> it doesn't mean that they literally sat at the same table as the Queen, which would have run counter to all Eastern propriety. It is saying that these men received their sustenance *from* the royal table, not *at* it.<sup>36</sup>

And it is clear that it was Jezebel, and not Ahab, who ruled – not only in the palace – but in the kingdom.<sup>37</sup> Jezebel was very much the power behind the throne – the driving force of Israel's state policy. It was, we note, Jezebel who gave the order to butcher the prophets of Jehovah,<sup>38</sup> and it was Jezebel who sent the threatening note to Elijah (which set him off hotfoot to Beersheba),<sup>39</sup> and in all likelihood it was Jezebel who was chiefly responsible for the many 'altars of the Lord which had been broken and thrown down' – a statement we meet three times in chapters 18 and 19.<sup>40</sup>

Though poles apart spiritually, Jezebel and Elijah therefore shared *one* thing in common. Whereas many nations and rulers of the ancient world could happily tolerate the importing of foreign deities, neither Jezebel nor Elijah could, or would, countenance any rival god alongside their own. Jezebel hadn't one ecumenical bone in her body – any more than Elijah had in his. Their very names said as much – 'Jezebel' meaning "Where is the Prince?"<sup>41</sup> – 'the Prince' being one of the stock titles of Ba'al<sup>42</sup> – and 'Elijah' meaning 'My (or, possibly, 'whose') God is Jehovah'. Both therefore carried their creeds in their names.

If you ignore the man-made break on the page of your Bible and read straight into chapter 17 from chapter 16,<sup>43</sup> it is impossible to miss the abruptness of Elijah's appearance – as he suddenly leaps onto the page ... bursting – unannounced and unattended – onto the scene.<sup>44</sup> 2 Kings 2 tells how Elijah 'went up ... into heaven',<sup>45</sup> and, as far as anyone in Samaria at the time was concerned, he might as well have *dropped down* from there!

One sixteenth century scholar, with an eye to Elijah's sudden appearance and miraculous disappearance, expressed it far better than I ever could, 'He comes in like a *tempest*, who went out in a *whirlwind*'.<sup>46</sup>

Elijah is the fourth most mentioned Old Testament character in the New Testament, after Moses, Abraham and David, being referred to or quoted more or less 30 times.<sup>47</sup> And yet we know precious little of the man's personal circumstances.

Our passage tells us next to nothing of Elijah's background,<sup>48</sup> and, because the Books of Chronicles focus mainly on the kingdom of Judah and not the kingdom of Israel, no mention is made there of either Elijah or Elisha. We therefore lack the benefit of a parallel account,<sup>49</sup> and so possess no details of Elijah's birth, parentage or call to be a prophet.

Chapter 17 verse 1 tells us only from where he came. Elijah is described first as 'the Tishbite' – a man from Tishbe, situated in upper Galilee in the tribal area of *Naphtali*.<sup>50</sup> He is further described in the King James Version as 'of the inhabitants of Gilead' – on the other side of Jordan, that is. But the word translated 'inhabitants' is more accurately rendered 'sojourners, settlers, resident-strangers', and indicates that Elijah lived in some place (in this case *Gilead*) other than his birthplace (*Tishbe*).<sup>51</sup> Chapter 15 tells how Benhadad I, the king of Syria<sup>52</sup> – summoned by Asa, King of Judah – had struck and smitten 'all the land of *Naphtali*' in Israel,<sup>53</sup> – no doubt compelling many of the inhabitants there, whose eastern border was the Jordan, to flee across the river to find refuge in the wild, rugged region of Gilead. I *suspect* that Elijah was one of them.<sup>54</sup>

This *may* or *may not* be so. But I know one thing for sure about where Elijah had come from when he faced Ahab in verse 1 – and this because the New Testament tells us. He had come from *the presence of God*.

Just as his later antitype, John the Baptist, Elijah 'was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel'.<sup>55</sup> And, as far as I can tell, up to that moment, Elijah was unknown either to the palace or to the people in general – but he was *not* unknown to God.

James cites Elijah as a striking example of the mighty things which can be accomplished by the earnest prayer of one righteous man. 'The prayer of a righteous man', James wrote, 'is very strong in its working (literally). Elijah was', James adds, 'a man of like passions (like feelings) to us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it *did* not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit'.<sup>56</sup>

Interestingly, James didn't choose a man whose prayer had commanded *the sun* – as had the prayers of both Joshua and Isaiah,<sup>57</sup> nor a man whose prayer had commanded *the thunder* – as had the prayer of Samuel,<sup>58</sup> but a man whose prayer had commanded *the dew and the rain*.<sup>59</sup> In view of the *extraordinary* answers to Elijah's prayers, James was careful to assure his readers that the prophet was an ordinary man – a man just like the rest of us ... 'a man of like passions to us' ... a man of like nature with ourselves'.<sup>60</sup> James wants us to know that it was Elijah's *prayer in private* which was the secret and source of Elijah's *power in public*. Ouch! Elijah could *stand* before a wicked king without his knees knocking because he had first *knelt* before a higher throne.

Unknown to Ahab – or I guess to any others at the time – the prophet from Gilead had agonized over the idolatry of God's people, and had prayed to the Lord for severe corrective action. Elijah clearly believed that serious disease called for drastic measures – and realized it was better by far for the people to suffer years of destructive drought, if this would turn them to God, than to enjoy prosperity in defiance of His laws. He may well have been aware of – and even possibly rested on – the Lord's promise to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7, 'If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain ... and my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land'.<sup>61</sup>

If I am right, Elijah prayed for the shutting of heaven that this might bring Israel to its knees in repentance – to bring the people back again to Jehovah, the true God. Hear him praying on Mount Carmel, 'Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again'.<sup>62</sup> Elijah was then, not merely *the prophet* of the drought, but, by means of his prayer, he was very much *the cause* of the drought. James noted in particular that Elijah prayed *earnestly* – literally, 'in prayer he prayed' – that his prayers were not just empty words – and that Elijah prayed *specifically* – initially, that it might not rain, and then, at the end of 3½ years, that it might rain again. There was nothing vague or fuzzy about this man's prayers! He prayed in such a way that he would know whether or not his prayers were granted! Do I?

James doesn't say it, but *we* know that Elijah also prayed *biblically* – consistent with the known will and the written word of God<sup>63</sup> – in accord with the principles, the warnings and curses which he found written in the Book of Deuteronomy. Take just two verses from chapter 11, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce'<sup>64</sup> ... together with words from chapter 28, 'If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God ... your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron'.<sup>65</sup>

Elijah was able to pray with confidence therefore because he knew that his prayer was in harmony with the revealed will of God. Though he was *a man of few words* – as we gather from verse 1 – he was *a man of great faith*<sup>66</sup> – of the kind of faith which grips firm hold of the word of God, and says, in effect with David long before, 'Do as you have said'.<sup>67</sup>

Although I concede we are not directly told this, I think we must take it for granted that Elijah received the assurance from the Lord that his prayer was to be answered. In chapter 3 of his prophecy, Amos noted, 'Surely the Lord Jehovah does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets',<sup>68</sup> and I take it that the Lord revealed the forthcoming shutting of heaven to *this* prophet. So, when Elijah spoke to Ahab of no dew or rain in the first verse of our chapter, he *knew* that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth – just as the widow of Zarephath would later confess it to be in the last verse of the chapter.

But of Elijah's earlier praying, the Holy Spirit tells us nothing in our chapter. He doesn't even tell us where Elijah met Ahab. It may well have been in Ahab's main palace at Samaria – because I note that, a little time later, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, 'went down to visit Ahab *in Samaria*'.<sup>69</sup> Although I guess it might just have been in Ahab's winter palace at Jezreel<sup>70</sup> – to which he returned from Mount Carmel at the end of chapter 18,<sup>71</sup> and where, at a later date, Queen Jezebel was slain by Jehu.<sup>72</sup> But, to the Holy Spirit, the place of their meeting was not the important thing – what mattered was the message.<sup>73</sup>

But what was this message? I note first that there was no preamble – that Elijah made no attempt to follow the political protocol of the day by bowing and scraping when he came before the king – no 'O king, live for ever' or the like.<sup>74</sup>

Again, I note that – surprisingly perhaps – his message was no sermon ... that Elijah made no appeal to Ahab for immediate repentance. His message was just a statement – a declaration.

To borrow words used in the New Testament of Moses ... 'not fearing the wrath of the king',<sup>75</sup> this mystery man from Gilead simply walked into the royal court one day to provide the king with the latest weather forecast – telling him that it wasn't going to rain tomorrow – nor, in fact, was it going to rain for many tomorrows! Indeed, it wasn't going to rain *again* – except by his – Elijah's – word. And he made it crystal clear that he had no intention of saying the word for some time yet – that there would 'not be dew nor rain these years'.

Not, of course, that Elijah himself could shut and open the heavens, but he spoke in the name of the One 'who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens'.<sup>76</sup> And who is this of whom Elijah knows himself to be simply the mouthpiece? None less, he claims, than 'the Lord, the God of Israel'.

And I note that Elijah's use of this title is particularly appropriate when addressing King Ahab, in that, by this title, the Holy Spirit links together the close of chapter 16 and the opening of chapter 17 ... telling us that the One in whose name Elijah speaks ('the Lord, the God of Israel') is the self-same One whom Ahab had 'provoked' ('irritated', 'made angry') more than any king before him.<sup>77</sup>

Again, I note that Elijah offered Ahab no word of explanation for his long-range weather forecast – no hint *why* there would be neither dew nor rain – leaving Ahab to work out for himself the significance of the announced drought.

We are not told whether Jezebel was present with Ahab when Elijah delivered his message – although we know that queens often did sit alongside kings when they conducted official business.<sup>78</sup> But, even if Jezebel wasn't with Ahab on that occasion, we can be sure that Ahab would have wasted no time in telling her *the little Elijah had said* – just as, at the beginning of chapter 19, he wasted no time in telling her '*all that Elijah had done*'.<sup>79</sup>

And neither Ahab nor Jezebel would have had a moment's difficulty working out the implications of Elijah's bold declaration.

First, Elijah was saying to *Ahab*, 'Does the stopping of dew and rain ring any bells with you, O king? Have you never read, O King, the great covenant curses of Deuteronomy – that a closed heaven is God's response to His people's breach of His covenant when they serve another god.'<sup>80</sup> And you, Ahab, need to know that the Lord is about to inflict these very covenant curses on you and your people'.

Ahab *would know*, of course, that the results of such a prolonged drought would be catastrophic. The land of Israel was – and is – dependent for its fruitfulness on its rainfall. 'The land which you go to possess', Moses had explained in Deuteronomy 11, 'is not like the land of Egypt (which drew its main water supply from the Nile) ... the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys (like my native Wales, which also happens to be roughly the same size, which *drinks water from the rain of heaven*'.<sup>81</sup>

The land of Israel experiences a wet season during the winter, and a *very* dry season during the summer. It starts to rain in October/November (the early rain) and it rains on and off through the winter until March (the time of the latter rain). It doesn't rain properly at all through the summer – what rain there is being only very slight and intermittent – and the crops dry up. So it is absolutely essential that there is plentiful rain during the wet season. If it doesn't rain then, Israel's economy falls apart.

And the 'dew' – the Hebrew word indicating, not only dew itself, but light rain or drizzle, particularly that which falls outside the rainy season – was also a certain sign of God's favour – as Moses had once promised, 'His heavens shall drop down dew'.<sup>82</sup>

But if Elijah's announcement gave *Ahab* something to think about, it *most certainly* gave *Jezebel* something to think about.

To Jezebel, Elijah was saying in effect, 'And does the stopping of the dew and the rain suggest anything to you, O Queen? For you must know that my message is in effect a declaration of war – not on you, Jezebel – not on your husband – not on your father – but on *your god*!<sup>83</sup> *You believe* that your Ba'al actually dies each April/May and rises anew each October.<sup>84</sup> *You believe* that your Ba'al – 'the Rider of the Clouds' as you call him, the storm god – the source and dispenser of rain, thunder, lightning<sup>85</sup> and fertility – is slain every year by Môt, the King of Death, the god of the underworld – resulting in the dry season – resulting in times of parched soil and withered vegetation – when, as one of your poems expresses it, the "furrows in the fields are cracked".<sup>86</sup> And *you believe* that, with the assistance of his warlike sister – the goddess Anat – Prince Ba'al is then brought back from the dead – rising to occupy his celestial palace and to bestow abundant rain – bringing luxuriant pastures, well-watered fields and plentiful crops.<sup>87</sup>

'You may *well* be familiar also, Jezebel, with the words of El, the supposed father of the gods, in an old poem much enjoyed by your Syrian cousins - "If Most Mighty Ba'al is alive, and if the Prince, Lord of Earth, exists ... Let the heavens rain oil, the brooks run with honey, that I may know that Most Mighty Ba'al is alive". And again, you will know well how, according to your myth, the goddess Asherah thanks El for letting Ba'al have his own palace, because, "Now Ba'al will begin the rainy season, the seasons of watercourses in flood; and he will sound his voice in the clouds and flash his lightning to the earth".<sup>88</sup> Oh yes, Jezebel, *you believe* that all things – rainfall, crops, fertility and prosperity – depend entirely on your mighty Ba'al. But I tell you, Jezebel, that though it is part of your creed that, in due time, Ba'al is able to handle Môt, and even to handle the father god El – he is no match for Jehovah!

'Make no mistake, Jezebel – my God, Jehovah, lives – always lives – lives without break or intermission – and that – to discredit once and for all *your myth* that Ba'al is responsible for the seasonal cycle of "no rain, rain", "no rain, rain" – He, Jehovah, has authorized me ... authorised me as *His* consecrated servant – 'before whom I stand'<sup>89</sup> – for though standing now very literally in the presence of the king of Israel, I am ever conscious of standing in the presence of One infinitely greater ... and He – the only true and living God – has authorised me to serve *you* (and to serve all your people) notice that there will be no rain – no rain, do you hear? – for "years".

Do you hear me, Jezebel? "For years!" Jezebel, your fairy-tale Ba'al should rise from the dead and dispense the rains *every* year! What price then your Ba'al – when forced to retire in utter shame before the power of Jehovah?<sup>90</sup>

'And so, Jezebel, since Ba'al is the supposed provider of rain, and since Jehovah announces that He is going to withhold it, the gauntlet is down - the contest has well and truly begun.<sup>91</sup> It is very much a case of 'seconds out, round one'. I champion Jehovah's corner and you champion Ba'al's'.

'The withholding of rain is then, O Ahab, a divine chastisement for covenant breaking, but not only so; it is also, O Jezebel, the opening shot in a war which will, I assure you, demonstrate Ba'al's total *impotence* and Jehovah's glorious *omnipotence*.<sup>92</sup> So then, in effect, the God who answers by rain, let him be God'.<sup>93 94</sup>

And, having thus faithfully delivered God's word to the ruling power in Israel, as we read, 'the word of the Lord' next came to Elijah himself.

As we noted earlier, the prophet had appeared suddenly as if from nowhere – and now, having delivered his message, as far as the people were concerned, he vanishes just as suddenly. Indeed, Elijah appeared and disappeared *so mysteriously* on several occasions that some folk actually believed it was the Spirit of God who transported him miraculously from place to place.

For example, according to the next chapter, Obadiah, Ahab's steward and governor, knew that Ahab had sought everywhere for Elijah and had failed to find him; 'As the Lord your God lives', he said to Elijah, 'there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, 'He is not here', he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you' – and Obadiah then expressed the fear, 'it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know'.<sup>95</sup> And again, following Elijah's ascent to heaven in 2 Kings 2, the sons of the prophets at Jericho said to Elisha, 'Behold now, there are fifty strong men with your servants ... let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain (such as Carmel) or into some ravine (such as Cherith)'.<sup>96</sup>

But we know Elijah had to do it the hard way – that he would have to walk to the brook Cherith<sup>97</sup> – that there was no angel, no Spirit of the Lord, no chariot of fire, no whirlwind, to transport him there – that he would need to use his legs to cover the 25 miles – well, 25 miles as the raven flies!

There, according to verse 3, he was to 'hide' himself<sup>98</sup> – as he did later at Zarephath.<sup>99</sup> But why 'hide'?

I suggest for several reasons. First, and most obvious, in the immediate future at least, his life would be in great danger – if not from Ahab, then certainly from Jezebel.

I say, 'if not from Ahab', because I note that, although the 'governor' of Ahab's house, Obadiah – Ahab's 'royal chamberlain' – later told Elijah that Ahab had sought for him far and near,<sup>100</sup> he never suggested that *Ahab* did so with the intention of killing Elijah. Indeed, when Elijah gave Ahab advance notice through Obadiah that he would present himself to him, he (Ahab) took no steps to organise a nasty reception committee or choose the hymns for Elijah's funeral.<sup>101</sup> I note that Obadiah's fear was that Ahab would kill *him* – Obadiah – if Elijah *failed* to put in an appearance – *not* that Ahab would kill *Elijah* if he *did* put in an appearance.<sup>102</sup>

But Jezebel was a very different matter! Even if she wasn't present in verse 1, I don't think you need to be a genius to work out what her reaction would be when Ahab told her of Elijah's challenge. I take it we can assume she would react then exactly as she did at the beginning of chapter 19 – violently – and attempt to take Elijah's life.<sup>103</sup>

I know some regard it unlikely that, once drought and famine took firm hold, even Jezebel would have attempted to kill Elijah, because he had made it clear that the opening of the shut heavens was dependent entirely on *his* word – in effect, of course, the word of the Lord through him – and that for her therefore to have put the Lord's prophet to death would have cut off any hope of ending the crippling drought.

But, for my part, I suspect that, as a fervent and devoted follower of Ba'al, Jezebel firmly believed that, though Elijah had *claimed* that any future rainfall would come only 'according to his word', the *real* reason that there was no rain was that her Mighty Ba'al had taken umbrage at Elijah's blasphemous claim, and that, in his anger, Ba'al had withheld the rain – the rain which she had been taught from her earliest childhood to attribute to his power. And so, if I am right, as Jezebel saw it, for her to eliminate Elijah, far from extending the length of the drought, would in fact bring about its end.

Indeed, it is at least possible that it was only following Elijah's declaration of the Lord's war on Ba'al that Jezebel issued the order to massacre the Lord's prophets generally. We are told that Obadiah then hid two sets of 50 of these in a cave – which I suspect he could not have sustained indefinitely, and hardly for more than 3½ years.

I note also that, even after the Lord had demonstrated in the most 'striking' way that He – Jehovah, and not her 'Most Mighty Ba'al', was the only true and living God, and that Elijah truly was His servant (and I have my eye on the end of verse 36 of the next chapter) ... and even though, courtesy of Ahab's report, Jezebel knew all this ... I note that she still served Elijah notice of her intention to have him killed. For by that time the required rain had, of course, fallen – and lots of it.<sup>104</sup>

There was then just no telling how far Jezebel's hatred for Elijah would have taken her. So to 'hide' himself was sound policy.

Apart from which, it may well be that God saw fit to remove Elijah from the public stage for over three years that the people of Israel should suffer the full impact of the drought without being able to plead with Elijah to call it off. Now having only Jehovah or Ba'al to cry to, the people would be compelled to acknowledge Jehovah's superiority over Ba'al, even before the great fire-from-heaven contest on Mount Carmel.<sup>105</sup>

Jehovah's prophets may be slaughtered by Jezebel – and Ba'al may still be worshipped over the length and breadth of the land – but there would be no denying the evidence provided by the prolonged drought ... that Jehovah lived – and that He – and not Ba'al – was the only true God.<sup>106 107</sup>

Well, that is all for this evening. Tomorrow evening, God willing, we shall take up the story at verse 4.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See *JETS* 22/3 (September 1979) 193-202. Also [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_elijah.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_elijah.html).

<sup>2</sup> See 'Kingdom of Priests', page 346. The division came in 931/930 and Ahab came to the throne in 874 – see Thiele, pages 87, 94.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Kingdom of Priests', page 346. Also Thiele's references to Hazael and Jehu, page 104.

<sup>4</sup> 'The same guiding principle which led (the writer) to devote so many of his pages to the reign of Solomon, when the theocratic kingdom was at its highest, impelled him to linger over the reign of Ahab when religion was at its lowest ebb', Pulpit Commentary.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Chron. 19. 2. This Jehu is to be distinguished from the king of Israel by the same name.

<sup>6</sup> Ahab and his father Omri exceeded the sins of all the kings that preceded them, 1 Kings 16. 25, 30, 33. 'It is not difficult to see in what way Ahab's rule was worse even than Omri's. The latter had gone beyond his predecessors in the matter of the calf-worship ... "And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him", Heb. as marg. was it a light thing?', Pulpit Commentary. More able and more profane than his predecessors. 'In his days did Hiel the Bethelite ...', it was reserved for a man of Bethel to commit this act of impiety. It was to such results the worship of the calves contributed. 'Build', i.e. fortify, as in 12. 25; 15. 17; cf. 9. 17. It is clear from Judg. 3. 13 and 2 Sam. 10. 5 that it had not been entirely uninhabited. But the Arab village was now converted into a town with gates and bars. This took place five and a half centuries after the curse was pronounced – which was around 1400 BC. This is not a piece of unrelated trivia about building work. This open defiance of God's word is added as characteristic of Ahab's reign. The curse did not prohibit men from living on the site, and there were settlements there, Josh. 18. 21. the curse was on anyone who presumed and dared to rebuild Jericho as a fortress.

<sup>7</sup> The name Ba'al appears first in the name of Jezebel's father, then we are told of Ahab's worship of ball, his altar to Ba'al, and the house of Ba'al.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Kings 10. 21.

<sup>9</sup> In many ways this temple may have been meant to vie with the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. We read that Ahab also made an Asherah pole ('a grove', KJV – Asherah was the goddess of Tyre and Sidon [New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, No. 895], and consort of Ba'al [See New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, Vol. 1, page 424]), v. 33. And so Ahab led Israel in a horrendous downward spiral of idolatry which made the sins of Jeroboam (regarded by scripture as themselves extremely serious – being mentioned no less than 19 times in the books of Kings [14 times 'the sins of', plus 5 times 'the way of']) – he made those sins seem mild by comparison to his own.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 16. 25, 30, 33.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 16. 25-26.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Kings 14. 16; 15. 26, 30, 34; 16. 19, 26; 22. 52; 2 Kings 3. 3; 10. 29, 31; 13. 2, 6, 11; 14. 24; 15. 9, 18, 24, 28; 23. 15.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 22. 6. For he enquired 'of the Lord', v. 5. Probably associated with calf/ox worship because Jehoshaphat asked for 'a prophet of the Lord besides', v. 7.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 22. 51. It seems that Jezebel had a strong religious influence on Ahaziah, for, after a fall through the lattice in his upper room, he sent a deputation to Ba'al-Zebub, the god of Ekron, 2 Kings 1. 2.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Kings 1. 17; 2 Chron. 22. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Kings 8. 26-27. See [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_elijah.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_elijah.html)

<sup>17</sup> She constructed a house for Ba'al in Jerusalem itself – together with numerous altars and images, 2 Chron. 23. 17, and murdered all her own grandchildren of David's line – except for the one – Joash – who was saved providentially, under God, by the timely intervention of his aunt, Jehoshabath, 2 Chron. 22. 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Kings 17. 33.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Kings 21. 25. For Ahab's 'diplomatic alliances', see New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 364. 'Omri, from a political standpoint, was the greatest king in Israel's history. But from God's standpoint, he was a total, abject failure. The most wicked man God ever knew. He passed on to his son Ahab not only a stable kingdom, but a wicked one. He also gave Jezebel to Ahab, to be his wife. Omri made a political alliance with the Sidonians and, as a result of this alliance, gained a princess for his son Ahab. That was the infamous Jezebel. We know from history that her father was the king/priest of the Phoenicians. He murdered his own brother to come to the throne', David H. Roper.

Jeroboam's son and successor was killed by Baasha, Baasha's son and successor was killed by Zimri, who reigned for a week, and then burned the palace and died in the flames. A struggle for the throne followed between Omri, the commander-in-chief, and Tibni, 'Tibni died, and Omri reigned.' So, in fifty years, the kingdom that was to relieve Israel from oppression staggered through seas of blood, and four kings, or would-be kings, died by violence. Omri's dynasty lasted about as long, namely, through the reigns of four kings, and was then swept away like the others, in blood and fire.

To marry a princess from Phoenicia was a master-stroke; Israelite goods now had access to world ports via Phoenician ports and seamanship. The alliance profited both countries.

He 'was an able statesman and strategist', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 366. 'This alliance, it is extremely probable, was made for purely political reasons, as a counterpoise against the active, ambitious, and encroaching power which had arisen in Damascene Syria. The army which had

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already humbled Omri (20. 34) could not fail to be a source of danger to Tyre', Pulpit Bible. King Mesha on the Moabite stone : Omri 'humbled Moab many years'. For the next hundred years, Assyria would refer to Israel as 'the house of Omri', Micah 6. 16. The narrator isn't ignorant of Omri's achievements; he is saying that they don't matter. The narrator takes a prophetic rather than a political view – Ahab was uniquely evil. Omri had been rated the extreme of evil to date, but suddenly the award is wrenched from him, and handed to his son Ahab. It was Ba'al worship which engraved his name at the head of the monument of apostasy. The lessons to be drawn from these severely condensed records, cut down to the bone, as it were, are plain. The first of them is, that when a life is over, the one thing which lasts, or is worth thinking about, is the man's relation to God and His will. Here are twelve years' reign in the one case, and twenty-two in the other, all boiled down, so to speak, into half a dozen sentences, and estimated according to one standard only.

<sup>20</sup> 'If ... the wife of your bosom secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods ... of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you ... you shall not consent or listen nor shall your eye pity ... but you shall surely kill her; your hand shall be first against her to put her to death, and afterward the hand of all the people', Deut. 13 .6-9.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Kings 18. 5.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Kings 21. 1. 'When Naboth refused to part with his vineyard ... Jezebel ... could not accept this because she came from a country where individual rights were subject to the desire of the king', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 365.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Kings 22. 39. Archaeologists = built inner (5 feet thick) and outer (19 feet thick) wall of fortifications at Samaria. Also at 'house of ivory' they found walls faced with marble and found 200 ivory figures, plaques and decorations – with Phoenician markings on the reverse. See D J Wiseman, pages 36-37. Ahab continued 'to develop the building programs introduced by Omri', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 365. 'In excavating Samaria archaeologists discovered more than 200 ivory figures, panels and plaques in one storeroom', The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John F Walvoord and Roy B Zuck, page 535.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Kings 18. 41-46.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Kings 18. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Seems that, like Solomon long before in chapter 11 (note the mention of Sidon, 1 Kings 11. 1, 5, 33), Ahab could see the political and commercial advantage of alliance with Phoenicia. Indeed, the threat from Syria (more accurately, Aram) made such an association all the more desirable. Ahab secured this alliance in the usual way by taking a princess from there as his queen.

<sup>27</sup> New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 365. Cf. 1 Kings 11. 1-8. Also [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_elijah.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_elijah.html).

<sup>28</sup> Antiquities, VIII, XIII, 1.

<sup>29</sup> TDOT, volume 8, page 441 refers to 'the gradual fusion of the Canaanite fertility goddesses Anat and Astarte with the mother-goddess Asherah ... the LXX translates Asherah by Astarte in 2 Chron. 15. 16'; cf. 2 Chron. 24. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Probably images of Astarte. See footnote to Darby's New Translation. Certainly not 'groves', which is based on the Septuagint. For example, these asherahs were set up 'under every green tree', 14. 23; cf. 2 Kings 17. 10. Also see 2 Kings 23. 6. Again the regular connection with molten images and carved images, 1 Kings 14. 23; 2 Chron. 33. 19; 34. 3-4. The images seem to have been made of wood, Deut. 7. 5; 2 Kings 23. 6, and planted erect in the ground, Deut. 16. 21.

<sup>31</sup> New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, number 895.

<sup>32</sup> Against Apion, I, 18. 'According to Menander (the Phoenician historian, not the Ephesian playwright, as quoted by Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1, 18) he was the priest of Astarte, who gained for himself the throne of the Zidonians by the assassination of Pheles', Pulpit Commentary. Itto-Baal reigned for 32 years and lived for 68 years. Josephus also quotes Menander as follows: 'Pygmalion [king of Tyre, 831-785 BC; whose great-great-aunt was Jezebel]... lived fifty-six years, and reigned forty-seven years'. Asherah was also the consort of El, the supreme pagan deity. See ... [http://www.asphodel-long.com/html/goddess\\_in\\_judaism.html](http://www.asphodel-long.com/html/goddess_in_judaism.html).

'Asherah ('At-rt) ... She is the spouse of the father of the gods, and one of her designations is qnyt 'ilm, that is, the creator or mother of the gods and the deities are called her children. As a rule her name is preceded by the word rbt, that is, 'lady'. Sometimes she is named 'ilt, which means, 'the goddess', that is, the chief goddess, just as her husband is called El ['the god']. In the Epic of Keret she is designated 'at-rt srm and 'ilt sdyrm, signifying the 'Asherah of the Tyrians' and 'the goddess of the Sidonians'—an indication that she was particularly worshipped in Tyre and Sidon. She was regarded as the goddess of fertility, like Ashtoreth and Anath, and at times the distinction between the three deities was blurred. Consonant with this her character, she supported Baal, the god of the heavens and life, in his war against Mot, the god of the netherworld and death', Cassuto on the Goddess Anath.

<sup>33</sup> Compare the Lord's word to Thyatira, 'you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols', Rev. 2. 20.

<sup>34</sup> They were fed of her bounty – not that they literally sat at the same table, which would have been alien to Eastern propriety. That is, they had their sustenance from the royal table, not at it; cf. Dan 1. 5; 2 Kings 25. 29.

<sup>35</sup> 1 Kings 18. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Dan 1. 5; 2 Kings 25. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Jezebel was certainly not made of the same meek stuff as the wife of King Artaxerxes in the book of Nehemiah – 'the King said to me – the queen also sitting by him – how long will you be gone?', Neh. 2. 6.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Kings 18. 4.



<sup>39</sup> 1 Kings 19. 2. Note the clever way in which she wrote of blaspheming 'God' (*Elohim*) – not Jehovah, 1 Kings 21.10.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Kings 18. 30; 19. 10, 14.

<sup>41</sup> See New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 776. Probably describing a seeker of Ba'al.

<sup>42</sup> 'Jezebel' probably means 'Where is the Prince?' – one of the stock titles of Ba'al; 'El shouts aloud to the Virgin Anath ... "As for the Lord of the Plowed Furrows, where is Ba'al the Mighty ('Al'iyan Ba'al' – possibly, victorious Ba'al'), where is the prince, Lord of the earth"', UT 49, III,20-21 (The Ba'al Epic). See 1 and 2 Kings, John Gray, SCM, page 368.

<sup>43</sup> If you ignore the man-made break on the page and the large chapter number and read straight on, you see that the One in whose name Elijah speaks, 'the Lord, the God of Israel', is the One who Ahab provoked to anger more than any before him, 1 Kings 16. 33; 17. 1. To 'provoke' probably has the sense of 'irritate, exasperate, infuriate' as in 1 Sam. 1. 6-7.

<sup>44</sup> 'Elijah leaps onto the page', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 572. 'The startling suddenness of Elijah's leap into the arena, where he appears without preface or explanation, helps the impression of extraordinary force which his whole career makes', Alexander Maclaren.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Kings 2. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Bishop Joseph Hall. He appears suddenly, and disappears miraculously. The impression his ministry made upon the mind of the people re-appeared again and again after the lapse of centuries. He certainly captured the popular imagination. When, for example, the miracles of our Lord aroused the wonder of the people, many said, "It is Elias". As said, Ahab probably been on throne somewhere around 14 years before God pronounce His judgement – for He is longsuffering and normally gives those who sin the opportunity to judge themselves before He sends His judgement on them – both the world and His people - 1 Cor. 11. 31; 2 Pet. 3. 9-10.

There is no doubt that both Elijah – and his spiritual successor, Elisha – had an enormous impact on the nation of Israel. They didn't save the nation as such - it was too far gone for that. And within 75 years of the death of Elisha the nation collapsed. But if they failed to save either the nation or its leadership, they were doubt a tremendous influence for good on many individuals in the nation, who responded to their ministry and who clung to the worship of Jehovah. Not told duration – but NT = three and a half years, Luke 4 and James 5. Compare 18. 1.

Already the drought had lain on the land some six months (cf. Luke 4. 25; James 5. 17 with 1 Kings 18. 1)? AW Pink = 'How, then, are we to explain those extra six months? In this way: there had *already been* a six months' drought when Elijah visited Ahab'. So Whitcomb. But no suggestion – or need for theory.

Barnes = From 1 Kings 18. 1, 45, it would seem that the rain fell on the third year— that is, at the end of the third year after the rain had ceased to fall at the usual time. There were two seasons of the year when rains fell in Judea—in October and April, called the early and latter rain; consequently there was an interval between them of six months. To the three years, therefore, when rain was withheld at the usual times, are to be added the previous six months, when no rain fell as a matter of course, and consequently three years and six months elapsed without rain. But assumes Elijah spoke in October and that judgement was no dew either! Which was vital during dry season – May-September.

Henry = It is said there that the heaven was shut up three years and six months; whereas it is said, 1 Kings 18. 1, that in the third year Elijah showed himself to Ahab, and there was rain; but that was not the third year of the drought, but the third year of Elijah's sojourning with the widow of Sarepta. Note 'after many days' in 18.1 with 'after many days' in 17. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Elijah is the fourth most mentioned OT character in the New Testament, after Moses, Abraham and David, being referred to or quoted 29 times. The majority of these references occur in the Gospels and once each in Romans, James and Revelation. See Table 3 in [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_elijah.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_elijah.html).

<sup>48</sup> Know even less of many other prophets – sometimes not even names – but Elijah is different in that occupy central stage for 6 chapters of Bible.

<sup>49</sup> Baasha, Omri and Ahab mentioned only as affect history of Judah.

<sup>50</sup> According to the apocryphal book of Tobit 1. 2 : '... the acts of Tobit ... of the descendants of Asiel and the tribe of Naphtali, who in the days of Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians, was taken into captivity from Tishbe, which is to the south of Kedesh Naphtali in Galilee above Asher'.

<sup>51</sup> The word translated 'sojourners' (which could perhaps be rendered 'colonists') is very similar to the word translated 'Tishbe', and may therefore 'involve a pun', New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, volume 4, page 573.

<sup>52</sup> Aram.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Kings 15. 20; 2 Chron. 16. 4. This was some 21 years (2 Chron. 15. 10 with 16. 1) after many in Israel went over to Asa in Judah, 'when they saw that the Lord his God was with him', 2 Chron. 15. 9.

<sup>54</sup> See WTJ — V41 #1 — Fall 1978 — 124.

<sup>55</sup> Luke 1. 80.

<sup>56</sup> James 5. 16-18.

<sup>57</sup> Joshua 10. 12-13; 2 Kings 20. 11.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Sam. 7. 9-10.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps because in each of the other cases the miraculous answer to prayer was short-lived. Whereas Elijah's prayers controlled the heavens for three and a half years. It is possible that James was attracted to Elijah because

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Elijah had been the man to challenge indecision and double-mindedness; 1 Kings 18. 21; James 1. 6-8. Just possibly, James has in mind his context – of prayer for those who may be suffering discipline for sins. For Elijah prayed a second time – which was in effect for healing after the people’s confession.

<sup>60</sup> James 5. 17 – KJV and RSV.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Chron. 7. 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Kings 18. 36, 37. ‘And turnest back their hearts’, Keil and Delitzsch.

<sup>63</sup> Cf His spoken word throughout chapter - word of God is the theme from v.1 to v. 24 – see also vv. 2, 7-9, 14, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Deut. 11. 16-17.

<sup>65</sup> Deut. 28. 15, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Though not actually mentioned in Hebrews 11.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Sam. 7. 25. Although I concede we are not directly told this, I think we must take it for granted that Elijah received the assurance from the Lord that his prayer was to be answered. In chapter 3 of his prophecy, Amos noted, ‘Surely the Lord Jehovah does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets’, v. 7 – and I take it that the Lord revealed the forthcoming shutting of heaven to *this* prophet. So, when Elijah spoke to Ahab of no dew or rain in the first verse of our chapter, he *knew* therefore that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth – just as the widow of Zarephath would later confess it to be in the last verse of the chapter, v. 24.

<sup>68</sup> Amos 3. 7.

<sup>69</sup> 2 Chron. 18. 2.

<sup>70</sup> See New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, volume 4, pages 778-779 (article ‘Jezreel Valley’) – note Jezreel’s ‘year-round mild climate’.

<sup>71</sup> 1 Kings 18. 45-46.

<sup>72</sup> 2 Kings 9. 15-37.

<sup>73</sup> Scripture often suppresses details to focus attention on that which is really important in God’s estimation.

<sup>74</sup> 1 Kings 1. 31; Neh. 2. 3

<sup>75</sup> Heb. 11. 27. He boldly confronts Ahab, bearding the lion in his den.

<sup>76</sup> Rev. 3. 7. yet, in one sense, when Elijah confronts Ahab in verse 1, he (Elijah) holds nothing less than the keys of heaven in his hand – to shut so no man can open! And I didn’t make that bit up – with obvious reference to our passage, it is said of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 that ‘These have the authority to *shut up* heaven, that no rain may fall in the days of their prophecy’ (v. 6) – which drought will last, I note, for 1, 260 days – 3½ years [The three and one-half years was a period of divine judgment on Israel (cf. Dan. 7. 25; 12. 7; Rev. 11. 2-3; 12. 6, 14; 13. 5)] – matching exactly the 3½ years of drought in the days of Elijah, as reported both by our Lord in Luke 4, ‘Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was *shut up* three years and six months’, Luke 4. 25-26, and by James in chapter 5 of his letter, ‘he (Elijah) prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months’, 5. 17.

<sup>77</sup> 1 Kings 16. 33; 17. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Compare Neh. 2. 6.

<sup>79</sup> 1 Kings 19. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Deut. 11. 16-17; 28. 23-24.

<sup>81</sup> Deut. 11. 10-12.

<sup>82</sup> Deut. 33. 28.

<sup>83</sup> The material elements which mechanically produce dew and rain were worshipped by the Phoenicians, and now by the Israelites, while the God that made them was forgotten. Is not this the very error of modern atheistic physicists? They worship Ba’al and Asherah under other names, and ridicule faith and prayer. But Elijah asserts the *living* God as superior to ‘mother nature’.

<sup>84</sup> Or did she? See TWOT, number 262, page 262, column 1; New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, page 422. ‘There has been considerable discussion whether the Baal cycle and, in particular, the Baal-Mot cycle reflects the seasonal cycle of an ordinary agricultural year or a 7-year (sabbatical) cycle. The chief proponent of a cyclic seasonal interpretation of the whole of the Baal epic is J. C. de Moor (1971), who compares the allusions in the various sections with current climactic conditions known from Syria today. However, there are a number of objections to the details of de Moor’s thesis, as for example his reordering of the tablets so that the first 3 are to be read in the sequence 3, 1, 2. Thus, tablet 3 is related to the autumn, tablets 1 and 2 to the winter, tablets 4 and 5 to the spring, and tablet 6 to the summer. However, de Moor’s reordering creates a problem in connection with the building of Baal’s house, which de Moor has to suppose was begun, then abandoned, and only later completed.” [ABD, “Baal”; note the issue of the ‘fragmentary evidence’--there is a huge problem in how to sequence the events in the tablets and pieces of tablets we have. After Baal wins his palace, he is challenged by Mot, the god of death, who kills him. On another occasion Baal killed Mot for seven years. Since Mot remains dead for seven years, this cannot be seasonal conflict” [Cyrus Gordon, in BANE:93], <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/copycatwho1.html>. Yet ‘Melqart ... God of Tyre, King of the Underworld, Protector of the Universe symbolized the annual cycle of vegetation and was associated with the female deity Astarte in her role as the maternal goddess’ ...

<http://phoenicia.org/pagan.html#anchor90487>.

<sup>85</sup> In chapter 18, the very god who was supposed to bring lightning was now unable to; instead Yahweh brings the “fire from heaven” demonstrating that He – and He only is lord over nature.

<sup>86</sup> 'Christianity and the religions', Edward Rommen, Harold Netland, page 57. Dates the Ugarit texts a little more broadly from 1400-1200 BCE.<sup>20</sup> This being the case, however, it would appear that the traditions recorded therein antedate the texts by perhaps two or three hundred years. But 1) the Ugaritic culture expressed in the Ras Shamra texts may not be a complete and accurate a picture of the Canaanites who lived further to the south, and to the degree that this is true, these sources cannot necessarily be used to recreate Biblical situations where Israel is involved in some way with the Canaanites; 2) there is also the chronological problem, namely, that the Ugaritic culture flourished and died out before the Israelites came to prominence in the land of Palestine; 3) the fact that there is some distance between Ugarit and the southern regions of Palestine where Israel was situated could result in distinctions in culture, language and general ways of thinking and doing; Although these clay tablets were produced many miles north of the land of Canaan, they remain the only source for an understanding of Canaanite concepts and practices. 4) the Ugaritic texts as shown above are often times quite fragmentary and conclusions often rest on a restoration of the text in question. Taken together these four considerations should produce caution among specialists making comparisons in this field. ('Baalism in Canaanite Religion and Its Relation to Selected Old Testament Texts', by Greg Herrick, Ph.D.)

'The heavens fat did rain, The wadies flow with honey. So I knew That alive was most mighty (possibly, the one who prevails, the victor) Ba'al'.

As the storm-god, Baal's terrifying voice rent the heavens in the form of thunder. As the rain-giver and "the Rider on the clouds," he dispensed fertility. He was the centre of the widespread seasonal myth. When he was killed by Mot (Death), the dry season came. All vegetation withered, and procreation ceased. When he was revived, rain fell again and nature blossomed into productivity.

*Ba'al Epic* = El says,  
"if Aliyan Baal is alive,  
And if the Prince, Lord of Earth, exists,  
In a dream of the God of Mercy,  
In a vision of the Creator of Creatures,  
Let the heavens rain oil,  
The wadies run with honey,  
That I may know that Aliyan Baal is alive,  
That the Prince, Lord of Earth, exists."

*The Tale of Aqhat*. (14th c. B.C.E.) =  
Seven years shall Baal fail,  
Eight the Rider of the Clouds.  
No dew,  
No rain;  
No welling up of the deep,  
No sweetness of Baal's voice.

<sup>87</sup> Compare ...'Ba'al is taken by Mot into the underworld and rain on earth ceases as a result. Eventually Mot is defeated by Anath, Ba'al consort, who breaks Mot's body and uses it to fertilise the earth (hence Mot's association with the ripening of grain and fruit). Ba'al return from the underworld is marked with the renewal of the rains', [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_elijah.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_elijah.html).

<sup>88</sup> See John Gray, page 402.

<sup>89</sup> 'Before whom I stand' – means to wait before someone with a view to service. In effect, 'whose servant I am'. Recall the words of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, 'Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, *who stand continually before you* and hear your wisdom!', 1 Kings 10. 8 – but Elijah knew that he stood before One far greater than Solomon. Even the angel Gabriel could claim nothing higher for himself; 'Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years". And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings"', Luke 1. 18-19. It is the equivalent of Paul's, 'whose I am and whom I serve', Acts 27. 23. The Lord's consecrated servant, standing in an attitude of readiness.

Note his incredible claim. *According to my word*. If the rain should only come "according to his word," it was because his word was God's word. He speaks in God's name, as one who understood the authority of all true prophets. Hear Jeremiah, 'the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plan', Jer. 1.9-10. Elijah was well aware that he was totally dependent on God's word for knowing when rain would come, 18.1 – that he couldn't decide himself – ie implication clear, spoke as mouthpiece of Lord.

The one who 'stands' before the Lord, now stands before Ahab.

<sup>90</sup> Well did Jeremiah ask, 'Are there any among the vanities (false gods, things of wind – of no worth) of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he (the Same), O Lord our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things', Jer. 14. 22.

<sup>91</sup> There are approximately 89 references to the god Baal in the Old Testament and Asherah (40 times) and the goddess Ashtoreth (10 times).

<sup>92</sup> As the cracks in the fields got wider, Ba'al's reputation suffered a shattering blow.

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<sup>93</sup> Compare 1 Kings 18. 24. Thus begins the contest, not so much between Elijah and Jezebel as between Jehovah and Ba'al – which would reach its dramatic, public climax on Mount Carmel three years later and indeed we will see that many of the miraculous acts of our chapter are aimed at demonstrating the superiority of Jehovah.

<sup>94</sup> 'As the Lord lives' – though a common expression – dating back at least as early as Gideon, and used frequently by Saul and David, has special significance for Elijah. "Living" is the first word in the statement of Elijah in the Hebrew text and stands there for emphasis – stressing his faith in the reality of God. To be rendered, 'As living is Jehovah the God of Israel'. Not first use expression by any way : Gideon, 'as the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you', Judg. 8. 19. David, 'indeed, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hastened and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Naball', 1 Sam. 25. 34. Compare 'as the Lord lives', Ruth 3. 13; 1 Sam. 14. 39, 45; 19. 6; 20. 3, 21; 25. 26 etc – 1 Kings 17. 12; 18. 10, 15; 22. 14; 2 Kings 2. 2, 4, 6; 3. 14; 4. 30; 5. 16, 20.

No doubt, this had been called in question. For some 70 years, during the reigns of one king after another Israel had openly mocked and defied Jehovah, and no dire consequences had followed; and quite likely many had come to doubt the Lord's real existence.

And what tremendous encouragement Elijah must have derived from these words. Although 7000 not bow knees to Ba'al, Elijah stands alone to witness his good confession – and yet he is confident that he is not alone for he appears as prophet of the living God. Though standing physically in the presence of Ahab, but he was conscious of the presence of someone greater than any earthly king – the living God!

"The very first words of Elijah lay bare the secret spring of his fiery energy and courage. 'Before whom I stand,'-- that is the thought to put nerve, daring, and disregard of earth into a man ... This solemn and remarkable adjuration 'As the Lord lives, before whom I stand') seems to have been habitual upon Elijah's lips in the great crises of his life. We never find it used by any but himself, and his scholar and successor, Elisha. Both of them employ it under similar circumstances, as if unveiling the very secret of their lives, the reason for their strength, and for their undaunted bearing and bold fronting of all antagonism. We find four instances in their two lives of the use of the phrase. Elijah bursts abruptly on the stage and opens his mouth for the first time to Ahab, to proclaim the coming of that terrible and protracted drought; and he bases his prophecy on that great oath, 'As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand.' And again, when he is sent to confront Ahab once more at the close of the period, the same mighty word comes, 'As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him this day.' And then again, Elisha, when he is brought before the three confederate kings, who taunt, and threaten, and flatter, to try to draw smooth things from his lips, and get his sanction to their mad warfare, turns upon the poor creature that called himself the King of Israel with a superb contempt that stayed itself on that same great name and tells him, 'As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, were it not that I had regard for the King of Judah, I would not look toward you or see you.' And lastly, when the grateful Naaman seeks to change the whole character of Elisha's miracle, and to turn it into the coarseness of a thing done for reward, once again the temptation is brushed aside with that solemn word, 'As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none' ... that phrase, 'before whom I stand,' obviously means chiefly 'whom I serve.' It is found, for instance, in Deuteronomy, where the priest's office is thus defined: 'The sons of Levi shall stand before the Lord to minister unto Him.' And in the same way, it is used in the Queen of Sheba's wondering exclamation to Solomon, 'Blessed are thy servants, and blessed are the men that stand before thy face continually.' So that the consciousness that they were servants of the living God was the very secret of the power of these men ... No excitement of work, no strain of effort, no distraction of circumstances, no glitter of gold, no dazzle of earthly brightness, dimmed that vision for these prophets ... The secret of power and of calm is--yield your will to the loving Lord, and stand ever before Him with, 'Here am I, send me!'.", Alexander Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scripture, on 1 Kings 17. [See in Bible Study Articles on G Drive – freely downloadable from Archive.org.]

<sup>95</sup> 1 Kings 18. 10-12.

<sup>96</sup> 2 Kings 2. 16.

<sup>97</sup> 'The name Cherith is associated in Canaanite mythology with a mythical strong man ... Cherith was a man who could do anything--he could cope in any situation! His family was wiped out and all seven children were killed, so he gathers an army around himself, hies himself off to Edom, and defeats the Edomites and steals a princess away from them. He thumbs his nose at the gods and goddesses; they strike him with illness, but he overcomes that. He was a man who could cope with life. He was a hero, and later was deified in their mythology. My personal feeling is that this stream was named for him because it was a stream that endured when every other stream dried up', David H. Roper. (<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3371.html>.)

<sup>98</sup> 1 Kings 17. 3.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Kings 17. 9

<sup>100</sup> 1 Kings 18. 4.

<sup>101</sup> The impression from 1 Kings 18. 16 is that Ahab went immediately to meet Elijah – probably to reduce the chance that Elijah would disappear again. In which case, Jezebel would have known nothing of the meeting, and therefore have had no opportunity to order Elijah's execution – even if she had wanted.

<sup>102</sup> It is just possible that the Lord expected, as the drought began to bite, that Ahab would plead with Elijah. After all, if the prophet had claimed that the sorely-needed rain would come only at his word, what more reasonable than to urge him to open the heavens. I suppose it is even possible that God wished to deliver His servant from the temptation of praying for rain when he witnessed the acute sufferings of his people. See no hint that judgement on

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nation – Elijah not well known yet to people and not been among them for many years to be withdrawn – they certainly never have got point, as Psa. 74. 7-9! or not return.

<sup>103</sup> Not merely was his flight necessary in order to escape persecution or punishment—the search which Ahab instituted for him in part explains his disappearance—but to avoid importunity. It would have been morally impossible for him, though a man of inflexible will, to dwell among the people, while the land groaned under the terrible burden which he had laid upon it, and which he alone was able to remove. His life would not have been safe—see ch. 18:4—and the ordeal would have been intolerable.

<sup>104</sup> 1 Kings 18. 41, 45.

<sup>105</sup> So long as he remained amongst them, the people would have looked to him as the author of their calamities, or would have cried to him to avert them.

<sup>106</sup> 'Hide yourself' – contrast 'Show yourself', 18.1.

<sup>107</sup> The brook Cherith was a brook emptying itself into the Jordan; but whether upon the eastern or the western side of that river, isn't clear. It is perhaps likely that it was on the far, the eastern – side that is, in Gilead with which Elijah was familiar. **על-פני** means both "to the east of" (Gen. 25. 18) and also "in the face of," i.e., before or towards (Gen.16. 12; Gen.18. 16).

The first step that leads to Carmel in the west, must be taken in another direction. "Get thee hence and turn thee eastward" but Carmel lay in the West. God's ways sometimes seem strange.