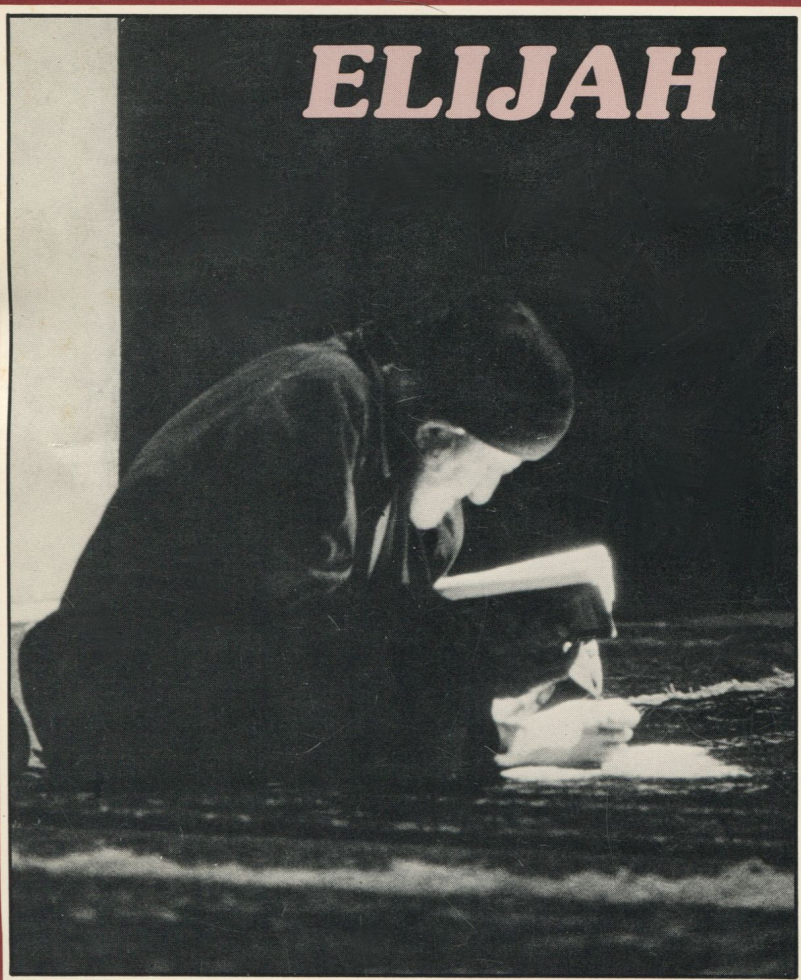


THROUGH THE BIBLE SERIES, vol. 27
Portraits of outstanding Bible characters

THE WHIRLWIND PROPHET

ELIJAH



Gordon Lindsay

Elijah .. The Whirlwind Prophet

PART I

by Gordon Lindsay

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Chapter I

Where is the Lord God of Elijah?

Elijah and Elisha stood by the river Jordan. Elisha watched as Elijah smote the waters with his mantle. The river opened and the two passed over on dry ground. Then Elijah said to his companion, **“Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken away from thee?”** The answer came like a flash. Said Elisha, **“I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.”** The request was a strange one but it was granted. While the two walked on side by side, a chariot of fire appeared out of the sky and swinging low, took Elijah up into heaven. But the mantle of Elijah fell at the feet of Elisha. He bent over, picked it up and then returned the way he had come.

At the Jordan, Elisha paused only a moment. In the distance were the sons of the prophets intently watching. He took the mantle and as he smote the waters he cried, **“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”** The waters of the river parted hither and thither as they had for Elijah, and Elisha passed over. The sons of the prophets looked at one another and said, **“The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.”**

Twenty-seven centuries have passed since the day that Elijah was taken away from the earth by a chariot of fire. Down through the years men have read, with fascinated interest, the thrilling story of the prophet’s exploits. But today this story has a significance that it never had before. And the reason for this is revealed in a strange prophecy that is recorded in the last chapter, of the last book, of the Old Testament.

According to Malachi, Elijah is to play a role in history, *twice*—a circumstance which, during this age, is true of no other individual! Other men have done great deeds and their work has lived on but they never returned to add further to the story. Death has been universal to all but Elijah and Enoch. But of

Elijah alone is it specifically said that God would send him again into the world—not during the Millennium, when the faithful saints of all ages shall return to earth to reign a thousand years, but before the Millennium. **“Behold I will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”** (Malachi 4: 5-6).

What a startling statement is this! It has no parallel in history. Is Elijah to come again? Will his coming result in a great revival? What is the meaning of this astonishing prophecy—a prophecy which was God’s last word to the world before the first Coming of Christ? To get an answer to these questions let us turn to the record of Elijah’s life. For in it we must find a key to the meaning of this strange prophecy.

On the scene of Israel’s history, Elijah appears with a startling suddenness. Like a clap of thunder out of a blue sky was his appearance before King Ahab. The abruptness of his coming and the rapidity of his motion in the events that followed was characteristic throughout his life. In many ways we must judge him as the greatest of the prophets.

Elijah’s life was a singular one. As far as human companionship was concerned he was a lonely figure. But he was not alone, he lived a life in close communion with God. He appeared in public only when he was divinely directed and then his appearance was as lightning flashing in the sky. His pronouncements of doom upon the enemies of Israel were fulfilled with startling promptness.

The translation of Elijah was an event that will never be forgotten as long as the world stands. The prophet himself was calmly aware of what would take place. Elisha knew of it and refused to be separated from him on the day of his departure. Even the sons of the prophets anticipated the event. (II Kings 2: 5-7). Years later, when Elijah’s successor was on his death bed, the king of Israel came to visit him. And as he saw that the spirit of the old prophet was about to depart, he recalled the words of

Where is the Lord God of Elijah?

Elisha at the time of Elijah's translation. **"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."** (II Kings 2: 12). The king realized that with the lapse of half a century, God's horsemen were again at the door!

In the life of Elijah we see the possibility that a man can impart something of his spirit to another. Thus it was that Elisha, an unknown plowman who followed him, received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. When Elijah was gone, Elisha carried on the ministry of Elijah in double power. The words "spirit of Elijah" is more than a catch-phrase. It is a tangible something which a mighty faith had created. A faith that had been born in a man's soul by his constant living in the presence of God.

God grant that we like Elisha may learn the secret of Elijah's power. That we may catch the boldness of his spirit, and emulate him in his uncompromising stand for righteousness. Then we shall have inspiration to fulfill our obligation to this generation. Then we too may challenge the powers of darkness as Elijah did in his day, and by faith stay the rising forces of evil that seek to engulf the human race. The cry of a perishing world today is, **"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"** Let us arise today with the boldness of Elijah and with a like faith challenge the powers of evil, even as the great prophet did. So shall we fulfill our duty to this, our generation.

Chapter II

The Appearance of the Whirlwind Prophet

The appearance of Elijah before the king of Israel, was at a most significant period in the history of the nation. Israel had divided into two kingdoms—the north and the south. As often as not, these two nations were at each other's throats. Judah's kings had not entirely lost their faith in Jehovah, but the rulers of the ten-tribed kingdom, from the beginning, had proved themselves to be men without character. The wickedness of one king was exceeded only by the one who followed.

A few years before Elijah appeared on the scene there had been a civil war in the North Kingdom, during which two contenders for the throne, Omri and Tibni had fought it out. Omri prevailed, and for twelve years he followed the example of the idolatrous kings before him. At his death he was succeeded by his son Ahab, who **“did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.”** (I Kings 16: 30),

Ahab, despite his wickedness, had moments when he had some compunction of conscience, but his supreme folly was his marriage to the notorious Jezebel. She was possessed of an iron will and in her hands Ahab was a helpless puppet. Through her sinister influence the worship of Jehovah in Israel was supplanted by Baal worship. She authorized the execution of the prophets of the Lord, and though a few escaped her hands by hiding in caves, many perished.

The brazen boldness of this wicked woman seemed to have cowed the entire nation. Her reign of terror, which she carried on in the name of Baal religion, eventually was to result in her name becoming a symbol of false religion. The name Jezebel is mentioned several times in the Book of Revelation as symbolic of apostate teachers, who sought to gain control in the Early

Church. At the first appearance of Elijah, this wicked queen was at the height of her power and influence. The unusual force of her personality is apparent in that, though Elijah had called fire down out of heaven, and had slain the prophets of Baal during the challenge on Mount Carmel, yet in a moment of weakness he fled from her for his life. It was the only time in his career when he showed fear.

Another odd event occurred at this time which was in keeping with the evil of the times. Hiel, an inhabitant of Bethel, rebuilt the old city of Jericho which had been destroyed at the time of Israel's entrance into the land of Canaan. (I Kings 16: 34). Centuries before, at the time of the fall of the wall of Jericho, Joshua had pronounced a curse upon the city. He said **"Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho; he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."** (Joshua 6: 26). Jericho, which had incurred the judgment of God, was not to be rebuilt under penalty of incurring the Divine curse. Hiel, however, had come from the city of Bethel, where Jeroboam had set up the false worship of the golden calves. Not taking the Divine warning seriously, or ignoring it altogether, he presumptuously laid the foundations and set up the gates. He paid for this act of defiance in the death of his two sons, Abiram and Segub. It was a time of lawlessness and of utter disregard for God's commandments.

Perhaps the most terrible development of all was the fact that it had become illegal to be a believer in Jehovah. The prophets of the Lord, with the exception of those who hid in caves and were fed bread and water by Obadiah, had been slain by Jezebel's state police. Elijah believed that he was the only true believer left in the nation, although, actually there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. But, because of the fierce persecution, they had apparently felt it wise to keep their faith to themselves.

At this critical and evil hour in the history of Israel, Elijah appeared before Ahab. His message was to the point. **"As the**

Lord liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be no dew or rain these years, but according to my word.” (I Kings 17: 1).

Clad in his rustic garments he appeared almost as an inhabitant of another world to Ahab and his court... **“He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.”** (II Kings 1: 8). His boldness in approaching the king and delivering his message was arresting, but at that moment his words apparently excited only mild curiosity. Had he delivered his message to Jezebel there would no doubt have been immediate action, on her part, to destroy his life. Ahab, vacillating and weak, pondered the message and, in the meantime, Elijah disappeared.

Months went by, the skies above were fair, even as they are much of the time in Palestine. The brooks and creeks continued to flow and a moderate harvest was assured. But the following year it became evident that a disaster was in the making. The winter rains failed to come and by now the brooks were dry. There was no moisture for crops, and the grass in the fields was drying up. It became evident, at last, to Ahab that there was some connection between the drought and the warning of that strange prophet who had stood before him. What should he do?

It never occurred to Ahab that it was time to call his nation to repentance. His evil genius, Jezebel, had but one advice to give. Find that prophet as soon as possible and cut off his head. Spurred on by her insistence, Ahab went into action. He organized a manhunt that would not only scour his own land, but a dragnet was thrown out to surrounding countries. (I Kings 18: 10). Nevertheless, despite the exhaustive efforts put forth, the search was entirely fruitless. Elijah had completely vanished. It seemed as if the very earth had swallowed him up. Israel, which had so boldly pursued its unrestrained course, was now face to face with a national disaster.

Where was Elijah all this time? Not far away, but in a place where Ahab had never thought to look. The Lord had told Elijah to go to the Brook Cherith and to hide himself there. This brook took water from the mountains and carried it to the river Jordan.

The area through which it flowed was a desolate wilderness. No man could hope to live off the country there. He would soon starve to death, if he were foolish enough to try. Ahab considered it a waste of time to look for Elijah in such a place.

But Ahab had failed to take one thing into consideration. The God of Israel was not as Baal, which had no power to deliver. He was a God of miracles. In the days of Moses Jehovah set a table in the wilderness for the children of Israel. Now he was doing the same thing for Elijah. He commanded His black servants to wait on the prophet. God's Word to Elijah had been, **"Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."** (I Kings 17: 3-4).

All this time Elijah was calmly spending his days in the quiet retreat by the brook, communing with God. Perhaps he would have been willing to have stayed there indefinitely, but God had other plans for him. There was work elsewhere for him to do. Day by day the brook had dwindled until it became a trickle; then ceased altogether. Just at that point God gave Elijah a special message. He was to arise immediately and go into the land of Sidon.

Chapter III

The Inexhaustible Meal-Barrel

When the Lord was teaching a lesson on Divine healing to His neighbors in His home city of Nazareth, He made the following significant observation. **“Verily, I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.”** (Luke 4: 24). He then drew an illustration from the life of Elijah. When the prophet needed a sanctuary during the time he was a fugitive from the king of Israel, and while the great famine was on, he was not sent to any of the people of Israel, but rather to a poor widow, who with her son, lived at Zarepheth of the district of Sidon, beyond the borders of Israel. Thus, God would show that He is not a respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of the motives of the heart.

Had Elijah been a man that went by appearances, he would surely have been disheartened upon his arrival at Zarephath. He might have supposed that the Lord would send him to a family with means, but one glance told him that the woman was apparently in desperate circumstances. Elijah, however, was never disturbed by outward circumstances. His thoughts were only upon “thus saith the Lord.” Many a person having received a clear call from God to go to a certain field of labor has, upon arriving there, found the circumstances to be anything but encouraging. Yet, only one thing is important—has God sent the person to that place? If so, He will see him through. When everything is provided, there is little necessity for God to show His power. But when the need requires, God is present to perform a miracle.

Evidence of the woman’s poverty could be seen as he approached the city. He found the woman gathering sticks outside the gate. Nevertheless, Elijah, without hesitation or ceremony, made his request. **“Fetch me I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.”** The woman responded to

his request. But she had barely started on her errand when Elijah added to his request, **“Bring me I pray thee, a little morsel of bread in thine hand.”** The woman sadly explained that she had only a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse. Now she was gathering a few sticks so that she and her son might eat, and die. Elijah was not disturbed. He had been fed by ravens and he saw no reason to fear that God would not supply the need now.

Said he, **“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. 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.”** (I Kings 17: 13-14). It was a severe test. The woman believed in Israel’s God, but to give the little food that she had left to a stranger, even though he were a prophet, seemed a hard thing to do. Nevertheless, she did as she was bade.

Here is a forceful lesson on giving. All the common laws of prudence would have forbade such an act. Before she gave away that last bit of food, had she not better make sure there was more coming? That is what the wisdom of this world would dictate. However, the woman decided to obey, and in so doing she intercepted the Divine law of **“give and it shall be given unto you.”** Had she refused Elijah’s appeal, she would have eaten her last meal and perished in the famine. As it turned out, after feeding Elijah she returned to the barrel and, lo, there was still meal in the bottom of the vessel. Likewise, the oil had not diminished. No matter how many times she returned for more meal and oil, there was still some left. God’s resources can not be exhausted. But the law of giving precedes the law of receiving. **“Give and it shall be given unto you.”**

The meal multiplied and the oil flowed only as it was used. The barrel did not fail, nor the cruse of oil flow over, but both meal and oil came only as needed. If we want a miracle to take place, there must be a need for that miracle. God does not store

up a lot of goods for us, so that we will have a large reserve to fall back on. God wants us to fall back on Him. He wants us to be ever dependent on Him and not on the arm of flesh.

In the battle of faith, we can never rest on our laurels. Victory today does not mean that the devil will not attack on the morrow. Satan continually seeks to upset things for the people of God. He looks for a weak point and there he attacks. Satan struck the child of the woman with sickness. Steadily the malady grew worse until the lad stopped breathing. Apparently life had ceased to be. What a strange thing that death could come into a home where Elijah was staying! People wonder sometimes why it is that ministers who believe in Divine healing are tested in their own bodies, or those of their family. But the devil will attack wherever he can. That is his business. It is up to us to meet the attack with courage, and not to falter one iota in our faith. We must not waver for he that wavereth is as a wave of the sea. That man shall not receive anything from the Lord. At times the battle may be hot, the pressure terrific, but those who are like Elijah will never accept defeat or failure.

Apparently, Elijah had not been called until the child was very low or, as it appears, death had already come. The child's breathing had stopped, and there seemed to be no reason for hope. It was a scene calculated indeed to cause dismay. The lad was the only child and the mother was taking it hard. To her there seemed to be some connection between Elijah's presence and the death of her child. Perhaps this sorrow had come upon her because of past sins. She saw how her own life contrasted with the consecrated life of the prophet. She realized that she was a sinner, and furthermore, that there was probably some connection between sin and sickness. In her vexation, she asked the man of God if he had come to call her sin unto remembrance.

Many people, when they have received some special blessing from God, become surprised and alarmed when strange and fiery trials come their way. They hardly know what to make of it. They say to themselves, why did God allow this to happen? Or, what did I do that this had to take place? But such is no time

for self-incrimination, or for one to let doubts come into the heart concerning the Providence of God. When trials and troubles come, the thing to do is to fly to the throne of Grace. God has the solution. He has power to solve every problem.

Elijah had one resource that never failed him, and he turned to it. But first he would take the child and get away from the woman who was so distracted with her grief. He carried him upstairs to the loft, where he had spent many of his hours waiting on God. For a case like this he must get away from human weakness, human despair, and human doubt. The secret of Elijah's power was that he lived in a realm above the distractions of his day. He was impatient with any thought of failure or defeat. There in his room he laid the child on the bed, and cried to the Lord almost with indignation. Why had the Lord slain the child of the woman where he had sojourned? Why had the Lord brought trouble to the woman who had provided him a place to stay? Elijah was a man of faith, but there were things that he did not know. Men of faith can sometimes be mistaken in their theology. People are apt to think that any man that has miracles in his ministry must be correct in all his doctrine. Not necessarily. Elijah was convinced that no other man was left in Israel but he, himself, who had not bowed the knee to Baal. God told him he was wrong, that He had reserved seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. He thought that he was the only man in the land that really believed God. But God showed Elijah there was a man by the name of Elisha, whose ministry in some ways was to exceed his, a man who would perform twice as many miracles as he. Elijah thought that God had slain the child of the widow. He was like Job, who when he lost his children in the cyclone, said, **"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."** Job was right in that the Lord had given, but it was the devil that took away. Job thought that the Lord had smitten him with boils, but we are informed by the Scripture that it was the devil that put the boils on Job. (Job 2: 7). Elijah thought that the Lord had caused the boy to die. We know, however, that it is the devil that afflicts people with sickness (Acts 10: 38), and has the power of death, (Heb. 2: 14).

But, whatever the cause, Elijah at least knew who had power to do the healing. So he cried unto the Lord and said, **“O Lord my God I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again.”** Then the miracle took place. The boy revived and life returned. Elijah took up the child and brought him down to the anguished mother. Never before in history had a dead person been raised to life. We can understand the woman’s anguish, for she had no reason to believe that the child would come back to life. Death had struck many millions of times in the world and never once had it lost its prey. Would death fail this one time? It did! For the first time in history death was forced to give up its prey, and all because Elijah was a man that refused to accept defeat. He lived in the realm of the supernatural.

Notice the result of this miracle. The boy’s sickness and death brought no spiritual blessing to the woman—only despair and doubt concerning God’s providence. But when her son was returned to her, alive and well, her joy knew no bounds. *Now she knew that Elijah was a man of God and that the Word of the Lord is truth.*

Chapter IV

The Prophet Shows Himself to the King

The days determined for the drought had about run their course, and again the word of the Lord came to Elijah, **“Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”** (I Kings 18: 1). These had been terrible years for the land of Israel. The famine reached proportions of a national calamity. When Ahab realized that the drought had come in accordance with the words of Elijah, he took a course of action in keeping with his character. Instead of calling the people to repentance, he set in motion a national manhunt, in an effort to locate the prophet. After searching all parts of his kingdom for Elijah, and failing to find him, he sent messengers into the surrounding nations, to see if he could be located there. Ahab seemed to entertain the superstitious belief that if he could only lay hands on Elijah, he could by means of cajolery or threats, get him to call off the drought.

While the search for Elijah was going on, Jezebel, the infamous wife of Ahab, was not idle. She was convinced that Jehovah had something to do with the drought, and her answer was to initiate a fierce persecution against all His followers. Her henchman began a systematic rounding up of all who confessed faith in the God of Israel. Those who would not bow to Baal were summarily beheaded. Ahab, weak king that he was, permitted Jezebel a free hand in the use of his authority, in directing a massacre of all who were not Baal worshippers. These three and a half years were terrible days in the history of Israel. No doubt, they are a type of another three and a half years to come, the Great Tribulation.

Only once did Ahab stay the hand of his wicked wife. His deputy, Obadiah, was a man that feared the Lord. Jezebel would

gladly have included him in her cruel campaign to extirpate all who professed faith in Jehovah. But this faithful servant of Ahab was too valuable a man for the king to lose. So, although Obadiah had saved the lives of a hundred prophets of the Lord by hiding them in a cave and feeding them, Ahab chose to overlook the matter.

Obadiah was to be commended for his faithfulness in standing true to his testimony, and using his influence to protect the people of God. Yet, he contrasted greatly with Elijah. By being Ahab's right hand man, he was identified with that wicked regime. He was not a bold believer nor an outstanding example of a life dedicated and separated to Jehovah, as was Elijah. When Elijah met him he was wandering through the wilderness in search of grass for the starving cattle and horses. It was not a joyful meeting. The two men, though they were both believers, lived in different worlds of religious experience. Obadiah, when he saw Elijah, fell on his face and for the want of something better to say, said, **"Art thou my Lord Elijah?"**

How deadly an emotion is fear! How it keeps the believer from the victory that should be his. Obadiah knew that his life was not fully consecrated to God, and he was afraid. Actually, it was Elijah who might have had reason to be alarmed. Jezebel was ready at the first opportunity to cut off his head. But Elijah looked with disdain upon Obadiah, who was trembling and shaking with fear. He had little confidence in Obadiah's religion. Despite Obadiah's protestations that he had done much for the cause of Jehovah, and had risked his life to save the lives of the prophets, Elijah was not impressed.

He had no time for those who he thought were compromisers. Later, Elijah was to complain to the Lord that he was the only believer alive in Israel, thus showing how little he thought of Obadiah's assertions of piety. **"Go tell thy lord, Behold Elijah is here,"** said the prophet. Elijah considered that Obadiah's lord was Ahab.

In Obadiah's answer to Elijah we are compelled to consider a singular and arresting circumstance in the life of Elijah. After

explaining how he had braved Jezebel's wrath, and Ahab's displeasure, by hiding the Lord's prophets, when Ahab was searching the kingdoms for Elijah, Obadiah now foresaw a still greater peril to himself, if he went to Ahab and told him that he had met Elijah. Said Obadiah, **"... 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."** (I Kings 18: 12).

What was the significance of this strange statement? Why should Obadiah say this? Had Elijah been supernaturally transported by the Spirit of the Lord before? There is something about the sudden appearances and disappearances of Elijah that gives the impression that his movements were sometimes supernatural in character. Obadiah feared that when he returned to find Elijah, he would be gone. What was the reason for his fear? He believed that the Spirit of the Lord might pick up Elijah and carry him away. Supernatural transportation of at least one mortal, by the power of the Spirit, is recorded in the Scripture. Such happened in the life of Philip, the evangelist. After witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch, and baptizing him in water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away and translated him to a distant city. **"And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the Eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus..."** (Acts 8: 39-40).

Elijah later was translated and caught away to heaven by a celestial chariot, so that he should not taste death. Notice the peculiar effect that the translation had upon the sons of the prophets. When Elisha came to them they made a rather mystifying suggestion. They said, **"Behold now there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go we pray thee, and seek thy master; lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley."** (II Kings 2: 16). Despite Elisha's protestations they searched for three days. Why did they do this? It seems impossible to fully understand this act, as well as the

statement of Obadiah, unless Elijah, at some previous time, had been transported by the Spirit.

Notice these three points:

1. Obadiah did not want to leave Elijah by himself because he was afraid the Spirit of the Lord would take him up and carry him to some other place. The inference is obvious that something like this had taken place before. *Had Elijah been transported from the scene when he had first made the announcement to Ahab of the drought? What had happened previously in Elijah's life that had caused Obadiah, the moment he saw the prophet, to say that such a thing might happen to Elijah while he was gone?*
2. Notice that no one was surprised when announcement was made that Elijah was to be translated. Elisha expected it. The sons of the prophets expected it.
3. When the translation actually took place, the sons of the prophets were not sure it was a translation. They thought perhaps it was just another transportation of Elijah by supernatural means. In fact, they sent out a company to search the country for Elijah, "peradventure" the Spirit of the Lord had brought him down elsewhere.

The evidence seems strong that some strange experience had happened to Elijah before—an experience similar to that which Philip had. If so, we should bear in mind, however, that this was not a regular thing. Ordinarily, Elijah moved from place to place by conventional means. Usually afoot. When he escaped Jezebel's wrath he did so by running. This could be expected, however, for God does not perform a miracle for anyone to help them run from enemies He wants them to face!

Christ travelled by ordinary means while He was in the flesh. However, there were some interesting exceptions. Those were the cases in which, while being tempted of Satan, He was transported to a high mountain, and later to a pinnacle of the temple. (Luke 4: 5-9). There was also the instance when the disciples were several miles out in the sea of Galilee, and Jesus

came walking on the water. After He entered the ship, the boat was “immediately” at land in the direction they were going!

Upon reassurance from Elijah that he would present himself to Ahab that day, Obadiah went his way to communicate the news to the king. Upon receiving these tidings, Ahab lost no time in going to meet Elijah. As he came near, Ahab said to the prophet accusingly, **“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”** Elijah had an answer ready and he did not mince words. A man who lived in the presence of God and was accustomed to the moving of the supernatural had no intention of being browbeaten by a king. Ahab would soon learn his mistake. Elijah’s answer was, **“I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed Baalim.”**

No doubt, the king had contemplated taking some stern action against the prophet; but Elijah dominated the conversation. He told Ahab what to do, and the startled king found himself following the instructions of the prophet. What was the strange plan that Elijah presented to the king?

Chapter V

Contest of the Gods

So daring and bold in its nature was the plan of Elijah that the king in amazement felt obliged to agree to it. Elijah had said to Ahab, **“Go gather all Israel to the top of Mount Carmel. Send also for the four hundred and fifty prophets, as well as the prophets of the groves, which are supported at Jezebel’s table.”** Elijah was demanding a personal showdown with the followers of Baal,

Ahab was compelled to admit that the plan was fair. Here was Elijah, a lone individual, a man who had incurred the hostility of the king’s court, whom everybody held responsible for the coming of the drought, and who had a price upon his head. Yet, he intended to face this hostile audience and present his case. Well and good; the plan was agreeable to Ahab. If Elijah came out of the contest alive, then the king would miss his guess. What argument could Elijah possibly muster that would assuage the wrath of the populace who had suffered long months from the famine? What could the prophet say that would give him respite from those who were thirsting for his blood?

The prophets of Baal, confident in their numbers, were present at the appointed hour eager to get their hands on Elijah. They knew just what to do. Before the sun went down that day, off would come the prophet’s head, and that would take care of that little matter!

The Number 450

Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Does this number have a significance? Notice that the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah came four hundred and fifty years after the flood. Again, judgment came on the Canaanitish nations four hundred and fifty years after Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. The

Amalekite judgment came yet another four hundred and fifty years later. There is much more we could say on the significance of the number four hundred and fifty, but we will call attention to just one more example—the judgment that fell on the Roman Empire. Rome put to death John the Baptist and Christ about the years 26 and 30 A. D., respectively. Add four hundred and fifty years to this and we come to the year 476 A. D. —the year that the Imperial Roman Empire fell! The number four hundred and fifty seems to be the number of judgment. The four hundred and fifty Baal prophets were men marked for Divine Judgment!

Ignorant of the mettle of the man who stood before them, the Baal prophets were eager to close the chapter on Elijah, but they gave him a moment to state his case. Jezebel had not bothered to come. Why waste her time climbing Mount Carmel? Her henchman would take care of that upstart, Elijah, who dared to defy the state religion. They had executed hundreds who refused to serve Baal and they would take care of the matter, this time. There was not a doubt in her mind but that her prophets would be able to handle the situation.

With the people assembled together, Elijah presented his plan for determining whether Jehovah or Baal was God. As he talked, his audience became very quiet. Elijah spoke as one who had authority. Instinctively the people felt a respect and admiration for this bold prophet. Here was one lone man challenging the whole army of Baal prophets. He must be a man of great courage. The people listened carefully to every word that he spoke.

God has his times. Because He permits evil to go unchallenged for a season does not mean that He has forgotten, or that He will not deal with it fully, in due time. The hour had come when Israel was to know who was God. As Elijah spoke, he made his famous challenge, **“How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”** (I Kings 18: 21).

Did this challenge show that the grip of the Baal prophets, even then, was weakening? Did these words show that many

were having doubts about Baal? It is probable that a growing number, who failed to express themselves for fear of their safety, secretly believed in Elijah and his God. Nevertheless, the people answered not a word. They wanted to see deeds, rather than hear arguments.

The situation at Carmel, in a way, is repeated today. The world is confused by a thousand voices. The religion of the non-supernatural, which answers to the religion of Baal, has its prophets that would divert worship from the true God. People living in heathen lands are not sure that they want to accept the white man's God if He has no miraculous power. There is only one thing that will convince them—the ministry of the supernatural. They will believe in a God of power. And have they not a right to expect such a ministry? Did not Jesus say, **“These signs shall follow them that believe.”** A miracle speaks a universal language that gives instant attention to the man who possesses that ministry. The miraculous was needed in Elijah's day. It is no less needed in our day.

Elijah had taken the initiative and he kept it through that historic day on Mount Carmel. He laid down the rules of the contest. The prophets of Baal were to slay a bullock and lay it on the wood, but put no fire underneath it. Elijah would do the same thing. The prophets of Baal were then to call upon the name of their God. Elijah, likewise, would call on his God. The God that answered by fire would be God! That was the challenge. It was fair enough—too fair for the devotees of Baal. They had no stomach for an actual test of the power of their god that had never worked a miracle. They had intended to seize Elijah and kill him. Too late, they realized that they had walked into a trap! The people took seriously the challenge of Elijah, and Jezebel's priests saw, to their dismay, that their sympathy was turning toward him. The Baal prophets looked desperately for a way of escape, but they saw none. They perceived, to their utter consternation, that the people expected them to accept the challenge. There was no way out. Even Ahab grudgingly admitted that Elijah's challenge was fair. If the Baal prophets failed, let them take the consequences; if the prophet failed, he

would have to take the consequences. The king would choose the winning side. He couldn't lose.

It was a dramatic moment in the history of Israel. The fate of the nation hung as it were in the balance! Would Baal or Jehovah triumph!

Since the Baal prophets were many, they were to prepare their bullock first, and to call upon their god for fire to consume the sacrifice. The false prophets realized that if Elijah could back up his words, then their own lives were in jeopardy. Failure on their part would prove to the people that what Elijah said was true—that they were false prophets. There was no other alternative for them. Panic-stricken, they began to call upon Baal. All day they lifted their voices in a frenzy. In desperation, they leaped upon the altar, while Elijah goaded them saying, **“Cry aloud; for he is a god. Either he is talking or is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awakened.”**

Stung by the mocking of Elijah, they made frenzied cries, and cut themselves with knives and lancets until the blood gushed out. But with all their hysterical dramatics there was no answer. The day declined and the hour of the evening sacrifice drew near. By this time the people were convinced that Baal had no power to answer, or to help his devotees. What, now, about the God of Elijah? What would He do?

Now the spotlight of attention turned upon Elijah, who by this time had his bullock slain and sacrifice prepared. Would his God answer by fire where Baal had failed?

Elijah already had gone into action. While the Baal prophets called in vain on their god, he rebuilt the altar of the Lord, which had been broken down. A rebuilding of the altar must always precede revival. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and set them in their places. He put the wood in order and laid the bullock upon it. Then he told the people to fill four barrels with water, and pour it upon the sacrifice. After this was done, he commanded them to repeat the act the second and third time. Twelve barrels of water were poured upon the

sacrifice—one for every tribe of Israel—until the trench around the altar was filled with water. Then came the prayer of Elijah: **“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 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. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and thou hast turned their heart back again.”** (I Kings 18: 37).

What happened is history. The fire fell, consumed the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones! It even licked up the water that was in the trench! That was enough. The effect upon the people was overwhelming. They fell upon their faces and acknowledged, **“The Lord, he is God; the Lord he is God.”** It is the miracles that convince people as nothing else. Miracles are the secret of a revival that will reach the masses for God. Elijah had plead with the people not to halt between two opinions, but they answered not a word. However, when the miracle took place, the people fell on their faces acknowledging Jehovah as God.

Chapter VI

A Cloud Like A Man's Hand

Ahab had joined the crowd which was now saying, **“The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God.”** He made no move to prevent the slaughter of Jezebel’s prophets. Elijah, seeing the people had acknowledged Jehovah as God, now promised them that the drought would end. He informed the king that it would be only a little while before a heavy rain would be falling and, as soon as possible, he had better be on his way. **“Get thee up, eat and drink for there is sound of abundance of rain.”** (I Kings 18: 41). The people, now fully convinced that what Elijah said would come to pass, hurried homeward.

Yet, when Elijah spoke of the rain that was coming, the sky was literally without a cloud. In this incident we see one of the secrets of Elijah’s power. He had absolute confidence in the Word of God. He was not governed by his sense knowledge. It had not rained for three years and a half, and according to the law of averages the odds were heavily against rain within the next few hours. But God had spoken, and that was enough for Elijah. That is what faith is.

Afflicted people often suppose that if they feel better after prayer, then they are exercising faith. But true faith is not the result of sight, or feelings, or because some of the symptoms have disappeared. Faith is built upon “thus saith the Lord.” Elijah heard the sound of abundance of rain, though, as yet, there was not a cloud in the sky. Nevertheless, Elijah earnestly prayed. Though the promise of rain had been given and he was sure that it would come, he understood that he had something to do. Prayer plays an essential part in the Providence of God. True, the blessings of God have already been provided. Salvation has been purchased at the Cross. Healing has been provided through His stripes. Yet, both must be appropriated by active faith. Elijah knew that rain would come, but he must

claim it by the prayer of faith. He knew that there were evil powers that sought to resist God's will. James 5: 17-18 says:

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by a space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Elijah, the man of God, went back to Mount Carmel and there he fell on his face. It is at this point that we first hear about the servant of Elijah. Of late, the prophet had felt the need of someone to share his burden and to carry on after he was gone. But apparently he chose a man who was totally unqualified in any way of helping him in the great task which lay before him.

We shall consider the story of this nameless servant of Elijah more fully in the next chapter. At this moment we shall notice briefly one thing that the prophet asked him to do. Elijah was in a prayer meeting. He sends his servant to look for rain. Six times he comes back and reports there is nothing. On the seventh time, he returns saying that a cloud like "a man's hand" has risen out of the sea.

That was enough for Elijah. He told his servant to run and tell Ahab to get into his chariot and travel full speed for home. As for Elijah, the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he ran before the chariot of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel! But why, it may be asked, had Elijah gone to Jezreel where the wicked Jezebel was? Had Ahab in a moment of strong emotion because of the mighty miracle at Carmel, invited him to his court?

Certainly this was an hour of triumph for Elijah. He had won a great victory. He had overthrown Baal worship and won the confidence of the people. They had been called back to the faith of their fathers. He had heard them cry, **"The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God."** Even the king seemed pleased with what had happened. If he had not been, Elijah would never have gone with him to Jezreel.

In Elijah's hour of elation, the thought must have come to

him that perhaps the worship of Jehovah could be brought into the king's court, as it was in the days of David. However, he should have known better. The only way Jezreel could be purged was by judgment. At the court a cruel murderess, in the person of Jezebel, sat waiting. When Ahab related the events of the day to his wife, her reaction was violent and extreme.

If the king made any protestations in favor of Elijah they were quickly silenced by this strong willed woman. When she heard what had happened at Carmel, her fury knew no bounds. Jezebel went into action. She exercised legal authority through the use of Ahab's name, (I Kings 21: 8) and Ahab was powerless to resist her.

But Jezebel was too angry to exercise caution in her method of apprehending Elijah. In her wrath she could not resist the temptation to send a messenger to the prophet at once, to let him know what he was in for. Elijah was resting from the strenuous labors of the previous day, when the news came. Apparently, he was completely unprepared for these tidings. There was no mistaking their significance. If necessary, Jezebel would mobilize the resources of the kingdom to destroy him! Said she, **"So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by tomorrow about this time."** The news struck as a thunderbolt!

The prophet was weary from his exertions and in this moment of sudden peril he naturally felt the need of advice. Who could he turn to but to his companion? What the servant told him can easily be surmised as we consider events which followed. But before we take note of this, let us examine what the Scripture has to say concerning this man who appears for two fateful days in the life of Elijah.

Chapter VII

The Man Who Had No Faith

The matter of who would succeed Elijah in his ministry was of the greatest importance. Upon the wisdom of that choice depended the successful completion of the prophet's work. As we have seen, Elijah had chosen a companion to be with him. As far as the Scriptures are concerned, this man is a nameless figure. He was Elijah's choice rather than God's. He was a man who had one of the greatest opportunities of all time and threw it away. It could have been he who witnessed Elijah's translation to heaven. He who had the privilege of sitting under the ministry of this man of God might have been the one who received a double portion of his spirit. But he missed it all and probably never realized he missed it. He was a prudent man who sought to avoid risk or danger at all cost. When he left Elijah he passed into unrecorded oblivion. He is remembered only as the man who saw the **“cloud over the sea like a man's hand.”**

It is on Mount Carmel that the servant makes his brief appearance. That day, it was his privilege to witness one of the most dramatic events of Bible History—Elijah's successful challenge of the Baal prophets. But his role in what transpired that day was disappointingly insignificant. So far as can be seen, he contributed absolutely nothing to the victory. The best that could be said of this servant is that he was a spiritual cipher, a man without a vision.

It may have been that he assisted Elijah in preparing the bullock for the sacrifice, or helped to rebuild the altar which the Baal worshippers had thrown down. But nothing is said that he did. The impression is given that Elijah performed the task alone. What seems likely is that the servant was dismayed when Elijah made his challenge. If Elijah failed, which to him seemed likely, his own head would be in danger. It seems probable that the servant stood off at a safe distance watching developments,

rather than identifying himself with Elijah. It would be good policy to be in a position to run if necessary. He did show himself, however, after the Baal prophets failed and the sentiment of the crowd began to swing over to Elijah. It is possible that he helped with the pouring of the water on the sacrifice—a job that would be fitting to his character. There are some in the church that seem qualified for this one thing only—that is, to pour cold water on every progressive plan that the church ever had. Such men have a small future before them. God has no need for negative people—people who drag their feet, when the call is to go forward.

After the slaughter of the Baal prophets the servant of Elijah is very conspicuous. He is now quite willing to be identified with the hero of the hour, and to share his glory. He remains with Elijah on Mount Carmel after the crowd disperses and while the prophet prays for rain. However, he takes no part in Elijah's prayer, while the prophet intercedes to heaven with his face between his knees. A man who cannot enter into the spirit of prayer with others, is no good at a prayer meeting. No use to tell a man to pray when he has no heart to pray. Elijah gives him a job. **"Go over there,"** he says, **"and watch the sky for signs of rain."**

So the servant of Elijah went on his errand to a place where he could get a full view of the sky over the ocean. He is back before long, and his answer is true to type. **"There is nothing,"** he says. Elijah, by faith, had already heard the rain. He told Ahab that **"there is sound of abundance of rain."** But the servant of Elijah had seen nothing. In a matter-of-fact way, he says, **"There is nothing."** He could see no clouds; he could see no rain. There are many such men as the servant of Elijah today—men who have no faith. They say that the days of revival are over; that nothing is happening. But others, like Elijah, hear the sound of abundance of rain!

The servant was no help at the prayer meeting, so Elijah sent him again to look. And again he came back with the same report. There was no rain nor signs of any. But Elijah was a man that

would not accept failure. Three years before he had prayed **“earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not.”** Now even more earnestly he prayed for rain.

While Elijah strained in prayer with his head between his knees, his servant continued to mark time going back and forth watching to see if anything would happen, but with not much expectation that it would. That is a peculiarity of negative people. Let them witness a hundred miracles and they will forget that. While others are rejoicing over the manifestation of God’s power, they are pointing to flaws in the ministry. Why wasn’t that cripple healed that has been prayed for many times and has never gotten any better?

However, as the servant made the seventh trip, he saw something in the sky that had not been there when he looked before. It was a cloud! Was the servant surprised by this? He seemed mostly impressed by the fact that the cloud was *small* and probably could not hold much water. He told Elijah there **“ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man’s hand.”**

Some say of this last day revival, it is the work of a “man’s hand,” and there is not much to it. But it so happens that this hand is the Hand of God. When God’s Hand is stretched out, nations tremble and fall. When a Man’s hand reached into Belshazzer’s palace and wrote on the wall, Babylon went down. When God’s hand reaches out in blessing, there is sound of abundance of rain. Elijah knew that the floodgates of heaven were about to open. The cloud that his servant saw was God’s handwriting in the sky.

Yet, God does not need the strength of His whole hand to bring more blessing than can be received. The finger of God is all that is necessary to put the powers of darkness to flight. (Luke 11: 20). God’s hand is outstretched in this great revival of the last days. It is bringing blessing to the hungry multitudes, though it may also bring judgment to the disobedient.

Victory had come. The sky was black with clouds. Elijah said to his servant, **“Go and tell Ahab to get into his chariot at once, lest the rain stop him.”** The servant looks at Elijah.

Elijah has no chariot. What will he do if the rain comes? But Elijah bids him go. The Spirit of the Lord is upon the prophet and he arrives at Jezreel before Ahab. **“And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”** (I Kings 18: 48). Somehow, the Lord checked the prophet from going into Jezreel. It was indeed wise that he did not. There was trouble ahead.

Elijah **“was a man of like passions as we.”** Morning comes and the spirit of exaltation is gone. He is feeling the strange reaction which men often experience after they have won an unusually great success. All he wanted to do was rest, and think things over. He could afford to let matters take their course for a time. Baal religion was overthrown, his followers slain or discredited. But Elijah little realized that the gravest crisis of his life was at hand.

If Elisha had been Elijah's companion at that time, he would never have been a prey to the weakness of that hour. It is a powerful lesson on the effect wrong companions can have on the strongest. Knowing the character of Elijah's servant we may reconstruct his interpretation of the situation. Ahab had given way to Jezebel, who was putty in her hands. She had usurped the reins of the administration. The police would be forced to do her bidding, knowing that if they did not, it would mean their heads. Cruel, ruthless and vicious, she was out for vengeance. The soldiers would be given strict orders to hunt Elijah and his companion down and kill them on sight. The servant therefore had one word of advice: Arise and flee!

Elijah was caught unprepared. There was no time to think or to fortify himself against this unexpected development. He had accepted Ahab's hospitality. Now he was betrayed, and those who had been deputed to take his life were on their way to get him. Before Elijah realized what he was doing, he and his servant were fleeing for their lives. Toward the south they travelled, eluding their pursuers. Passing Jerusalem and Bethlehem they, at length, reached Beersheba, the last outpost in Israel. The mighty Elijah, the man who had called fire down out

of heaven, the man who had broken the drought, had fled from the face of a woman!

At Beersheba *his servant left him*. That was the last time, so far as we know, that Elijah ever saw this man. From that moment he drops into obscurity. He was like Elijah in only one thing—he could run. But Elijah usually ran toward danger, whereas, it was his servant's policy to run away from it. Apparently the servant had enough of the ministry of Elijah. What he had hoped for and what he had experienced was too great a contrast. This was too hazardous an employment for him. The partnership was dissolved as far as he was concerned.

Destiny had brought this man to the very door of opportunity. Instead of Elisha, he might have been Elijah's successor. But he turned away considering that the risk was too great, and the prize that might have been his was lost forever.



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