

## Lesson 34: Elijah and Elisha's Excellent Adventures

We live in the age of super-heroes. By that I mean, we are fans of super-heroes. Movies like Captain America-Civil War and the Avengers are smash hits at the box office worldwide, as are the Superman and Batman series—and then there's Spiderman, Ironman and Ant man, as well as Supergirl and the Flash on television. You can't escape the influence of superheroes.

I think we love superheroes because they've got super powers that we'd all like to have, like Wolverine with his healing power. He's never going to be counted out of a fight because of his ability to heal and re-attach limbs; or the web-spinning abilities of Spiderman which allow him to swing through a downtown area as though he were Tarzan; and what could be cooler and more awesome than Superman's ability to fly and go faster than a speeding bullet-not a bad skill set when you're stuck in rush-hour traffic; and then there is the super human strength of the Incredible Hulk; or the ability to be invisible like the Invisible Woman, or the super speed of the Flash. Maybe you're bored and just want to get away. In a matter of seconds, you can be relaxing on a beach in Maui, or Fiji, without ever having to buy a plane ticket. And the list of super powers goes on and on. Maybe it's because so often we feel powerless, and unable to change things or make a difference, and so often, we sense that so many things in society are out of control. There is rampant lawlessness and we have corruption at all levels of government-so we would love to have someone like Captain America show up to root out all the evil and bring about some much-needed justice.

Along those lines, God has his own super heroes and in the Old Testament, they were known as prophets. The most wicked king in the Old Testament was Ahab along with his wife, Jezebel. He did more to provoke God to anger than all the kings of Israel. The Bible says that wickedness filled the land. Yet, God declared that there were 7,000 persons in Israel who had not worshiped Baal during that very wicked time.

Earlier, God had sent warnings and waited patiently for His people to separate themselves from the pagan influences that surrounded them and to return to true worship (1 Kings 14:6-16). Now God was going to bring a severe judgment on the nation to stir them to action.

God explains, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). To announce the punishment and warn the nation to change its ways, God sent a messenger, Elijah the prophet.

Now, as I mentioned in our last lesson, some of the material for today's lesson comes **The Bible for Dummies** by Jeffrey Geoghegan, professor of Biblical Theology at Boston College, and Dr. Michael Homan, Professor of Biblical studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, and published by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Their book, "**The Bible for Dummies**" is an excellent resource to give you a better understanding of the Bible. They explain everything in plain English along with some great illustrations and of course, their dose of humor and wit. So if you want to get a better overall understanding of the Bible as you are going through this Firm Foundation series, go to Amazon or Barnes and Noble and order this outstanding resource: **The Bible for Dummies**.

Let's review last week's lesson, **The Division of Israel**, before we get started in today's lesson:

### Questions for Review:

1. Was the division of Israel into two nations prophesied in advance? **Yes. The prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam telling him that God would tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon.**
2. After reaffirming his position as the new king, Rehoboam met with his advisors. Which advisors did he listen to? His elders or other young men like himself? **His friends who were young men like himself.**
3. The elders had counseled Rehoboam to lower the tax burden on the northern tribes. What did Rehoboam do? **He increased the tax burden substantially, and this was the tipping point that caused the ten tribes to break away and become their own northern kingdom.**
4. What two tribes comprised the Southern kingdom? **Judah and Benjamin.**
5. What sin did Israel's first king, Jeroboam, commit? **Idolatry.**
6. How did he commit idolatry? **He sets up a golden calf and then proclaims: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"**
7. What husband and wife team are among the most evil and vilified characters in the Bible? **King Ahab and Jezebel.**
8. Jezebel along with her husband, King Ahab, endorsed the worship of which false god? **The god of Baal.**
9. In the novel, *The Source*, what act was done to ensure a good harvest and to save the town from its enemies? **The sacrifice of first-born sons to the god of Baal.**
10. Timna, grieving for her son who was sacrificed to Baal, and has this thought. What was she thinking as she watched her husband walk off to spend the night with a temple prostitute? **With different gods her husband would have been a different man.**
11. We become like the \_\_\_\_\_ we \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the missing two words. **gods, worship.**

### A. King Ahab Kills His Next Door Neighbor

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

King Ahab, the 10<sup>th</sup> king of Israel, and his wife, Jezebel, are among the most vilified and evil characters in the Bible. They both commit horrible crimes against their people for personal gain. They also endorse the worship of the Canaanite god Baal and Baal's divine girlfriend, Asherah.

Ahab, like most of the kings of Israel before and after, worships a variety of deities. However, even worse than his apostasy is a crime he commits against a neighbor. Next door to Ahab's palace lives a man named Naboth, who owns a vineyard. Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard because it is choice land. However, Naboth refuses to sell it.

Let's read about this incident here in **1 Kings 21:1-29 (GW)**

<sup>1</sup> This is what happened next. Naboth from Jezreel had a vineyard in Jezreel next to the palace of King

Ahab of Samaria.

<sup>2</sup> Ahab told Naboth, “Give me your vineyard. It will become my vegetable garden because it is near my house. I will give you a better vineyard for it. Or if you prefer, I will pay you a fair price for it.”

<sup>3</sup> Naboth told Ahab, “The LORD has forbidden me to give you what I inherited from my ancestors.”

<sup>4</sup> Resentful and upset, Ahab went home because of what Naboth from Jezreel had told him. (Naboth had said,) “I will not give you what I inherited from my ancestors.” So Ahab lay on the couch, turned his face from everyone, and refused to eat.

<sup>5</sup> His wife Jezebel came to him and asked, “Why are you so resentful of everything? Why don't you eat?”

<sup>6</sup> He told her, “I talked to Naboth from Jezreel. I said to him, ‘Sell me your vineyard. Or, if you like, I'll give you another vineyard for it.’ But he said, ‘I won't give you my vineyard.’”

<sup>7</sup> His wife Jezebel said to him, “Aren't you king of Israel? Get up, eat, and cheer up. I'll give you the vineyard belonging to Naboth from Jezreel.”

<sup>8</sup> So Jezebel wrote letters, signed them with Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal. She sent them to the respected leaders and nobles living in Naboth's city.

<sup>9</sup> In these letters she wrote: “Announce a fast. Seat Naboth as leader of the people.

<sup>10</sup> Have two good-for-nothing men sit opposite him and accuse him of cursing God and the king. Then stone him to death outside the city.”

<sup>11</sup> The men in Naboth's city—the respected leaders and nobles who lived there—did what Jezebel asked them to do. They did just as she had written in the letters she sent.

<sup>12</sup> They announced a fast and had Naboth seated as the leader of the people.

<sup>13</sup> The two good-for-nothing men came in and sat opposite him. In front of the people, these men accused Naboth of cursing God and the king. So the people stoned him to death outside the city.

<sup>14</sup> Then the leaders sent this message to Jezebel: “Naboth has been stoned to death.”

<sup>15</sup> Jezebel received the message and said to Ahab, “Get up! Confiscate the vineyard which Naboth from Jezreel refused to sell you. He's dead now.”

<sup>16</sup> When he heard about Naboth's death, Ahab went to confiscate the vineyard.

<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah from Tishbe:

<sup>18</sup> “Go, meet King Ahab of Israel, who lives in Samaria. He went to confiscate Naboth's vineyard.

<sup>19</sup> Tell him, ‘This is what the LORD asks: Have you murdered someone just to confiscate a vineyard?’ Then tell him, ‘This is what the LORD says: At the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, the dogs will lick up your blood.’”

<sup>20</sup> Ahab asked Elijah, “So you've found me, my enemy?” Elijah answered, “I found you. Because you sold yourself to do what the LORD considers evil.

<sup>21</sup> So I am going to bring evil on you. I will destroy your descendants. I will destroy every male in Ahab's house, whether slave or freeman in Israel.

<sup>22</sup> I will make your family like the family of Jeroboam (Nebat's son) and like the house of Baasha, son of Ahijah, because you made me furious. You led Israel to sin.”

<sup>23</sup> Then the LORD also spoke through Elijah about Jezebel: “The dogs will eat Jezebel inside the walls of Jezreel.

<sup>24</sup> If anyone from Ahab's house dies in the city, dogs will eat him. If anyone dies in the country, birds will eat him.”

<sup>25</sup> There was no one else like Ahab. At the urging of his wife, he sold himself to do what the LORD

considered evil.

<sup>26</sup> He did many disgusting things as a result of worshiping idols as the Amorites had done. (The LORD confiscated their land for Israel.)

<sup>27</sup> When Ahab heard these things, he tore his clothes {in distress} and dressed in sackcloth. He fasted, lay in sackcloth, and walked around depressed.

<sup>28</sup> Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah from Tishbe:

<sup>29</sup> “Do you see how Ahab is humbling himself in my presence? Because he's humbling himself in my presence, I will not let any evil happen to his family while he is alive. I will bring evil on it during his son's lifetime.”

So Ahab is so upset after being rebuffed that he returns home and refuses to eat. Jezebel tells Ahab to relax, saying she will take care of everything. Jezebel pays two of her subjects to lie, saying that they overheard Naboth cursing the king and God. Because these are capital offenses, Naboth is summarily executed, and his property goes to Ahab.

Ahab and Jezebel would have gotten away with this crime were it not for God and His prophet Elijah. God tells Elijah to confront Ahab, who is out looking over his newly acquired property. When Elijah finds Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, he tells him that both he and Jezebel will die for what they've done. Elijah pulls no punches: “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, so dogs will lick up your blood. Yes, yours!” (1 Kings 21:19). This eventually does come to pass, but before their undoing, Ahab and Jezebel make a lot more trouble for Israel. Yet, as in the case of Naboth's vineyard, at each step of the way they have to reckon with God's prophet, Elijah, and his dutiful understudy, Elisha.

## **B. Elijah and the Widow**

Elijah and Elisha are extraordinary prophets, and their journeys and battles epitomize a complete devotion to God. Elijah is initially called by God to travel across the Jordan River into the desert where he is fed by ravens. Soon, thereafter, Elijah travels to Phoenicia where he meets a widow and brings her son back to life. Let's read:

### **1 Kings 17:8-24 (GW)**

<sup>8</sup> Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah:

<sup>9</sup> “Get up, go to Zarephath (which belongs to Sidon), and stay there. I've commanded a widow there to feed you.”

<sup>10</sup> He got up and went to Zarephath. As he came to the town's entrance, a widow was gathering wood. He called to her, “Please bring me a drink of water.”

<sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called to her again, “Please bring me a piece of bread too.”

<sup>12</sup> She said, “I solemnly swear, as the LORD your God lives, I didn't bake any bread. I have one handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I'm gathering wood. I'm going to prepare something for myself and my son so that we can eat it and then die.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Elijah told her, “Don't be afraid. Go home, and do as you've said. But first make a small loaf and bring it to me. Then prepare something for yourself and your son.”

<sup>14</sup> This is what the LORD God of Israel says: Until the LORD sends rain on the land, the jar of flour will never be empty and the jug will always contain oil.”

<sup>15</sup> She did what Elijah had told her. So she, Elijah, and her family had food for a long time.

- <sup>16</sup> The jar of flour never became empty, and the jug always contained olive oil, as the LORD had promised through Elijah.
- <sup>17</sup> Afterwards, the son of the woman who owned the house got sick. He got so sick that finally no life was left in him.
- <sup>18</sup> The woman asked Elijah, “What do you and I have in common, man of God? Did you come here to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”
- <sup>19</sup> He said to her, “Give me your son.” Elijah took him from her arms, carried him to the upstairs room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed.
- <sup>20</sup> Then he called to the LORD, “LORD my God, have you brought misery on the widow I'm staying with by killing her son?”
- <sup>21</sup> Then Elijah stretched himself over the boy three times and called to the LORD, “LORD my God, please make this child's life return to him.”
- <sup>22</sup> The LORD heard Elijah's request, and the child's life returned to him. He was alive again.
- <sup>23</sup> Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upstairs room of the house, and gave him to his mother. He said, “Look! Your son is alive.”
- <sup>24</sup> The woman said to Elijah, “Now I'm convinced that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is true.”

We are told that the Lord was withholding rain from Israel (verse 1). The drought was in judgment of the nation's rampant idolatry, led by the royal couple Ahab and Jezebel. In verse 8, the Lord commanded Elijah to go to Zarephath, a town outside of Israel, where a widow would provide food for him. He obeyed, finding a woman gathering sticks. He said to her, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink,” and, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand” (verses 11–12).

The widow, however, was in great need herself. She responded, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die” (verse 13). She expected the meal she was about to fix to be the last for her family. She had no other prospect than to die of starvation.

Elijah's answer was surely a test of her faith. **He told her that she was to make some food for him, anyway, using the last of her ingredients for him.** He added a promise: “For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth’” (1 Kings 17:14). **The widow's faith was evident in her obedience. And God was faithful to His promise:** “She and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah” (verses 15–16). The widow's food supply was supernaturally extended, as promised.

Elijah stayed there for some time, living in an upper room of the widow's house. The woman's son later died of an illness and, in her anger and grief, she blamed Elijah for his death—she assumed God was judging her for her sin (1 Kings 17:17–18). But Elijah cried out to God: “Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!” (verse 21), and the child was restored to life. When the woman saw this, she said, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth” (verse 24).

## The account of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath offers many insights:

1. God often uses unlikely people and sources to accomplish His purposes.
2. God's mercy extends to all people, both Jews and Gentiles, and the Sidonian widow was blessed for her faith (see [Acts 10:34–35](#)).
3. God requires faith ([Hebrews 11:6](#)). The widow's miracle only came *after* she prepared a meal for Elijah—an act of sincere faith on her part.
4. There is a blessing when we give to God whatever we have, even if it's the last bit of food in the house. This was in effect an offering she was being asked to give willingly to God by making a meal for Elijah with the last bit of flour and oil that she had. And God saw her faith and multiplied her flour and oil so that it lasted throughout the drought.

In the New Testament, Jesus sits down across from the temple treasury and watched the people throw in their offerings to God. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup>They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

This is exactly what we see going on here between the widow and Elijah. She is being asked to give all that she has to live on, to the man of God, Elijah.

## C. Showdown at Mount Carmel

**Theme: God is supreme and sovereign**

**Theme: God is all-powerful**

Distraught over Israel's apostasy under Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah gathers all of Israel to Mount Carmel where he has scheduled a competition. Elijah's sets up a contest with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel. Elijah invited these false prophets and all Israel to a demonstration to show that Baal had no power at all against the God of Israel. The outcome would demonstrate who served the true God (1 Kings 18:19-40).

Now this fire from the sky stuff should be easy for Baal, because, as the god of storm, lightning is his specialty. Despite this advantage, the prophets of Baal try all morning with prayer, ritual dance, and even bodily mutilation to get their god to respond. Nothing works. Let's read here in 1 Kings 18:

### **1 Kings 18:26-29 (GW)**

<sup>26</sup> They took the bull he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon. They said, "Baal, answer us!" But there wasn't a sound or an answer. So they danced around the altar they had made.

<sup>27</sup> At noon Elijah started to make fun of them. "Shout louder, since he is a god. Maybe he's thinking, relieving himself, or traveling! Maybe he's sleeping, and you have to wake him!"

<sup>28</sup> So they shouted louder. They also cut themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed. (This is what their ritual called for.)

<sup>29</sup> In the afternoon they continued to rant and rave until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no sound, no answer, no attention given to them.

So Elijah starts to make fun of the gods of Baal, saying that maybe they're asleep, or going to the bathroom, or traveling and can't answer, or maybe they're asleep and need to be awakened. So the prophets of Baal shout louder. But they don't receive any response from their gods, and they finally give up. Then, it's Elijah's turn to take center stage.

Let's read what happens next:

### **1 Kings 18:34-40 (GW)**

<sup>34</sup> He said, "Fill four jars with water. Pour the water on the offering and on the wood." Then he said, "Do it again," and they did it again. Then he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time.

<sup>35</sup> The water flowed around the altar, and even the trench was filled with water.

<sup>36</sup> When it was time to offer the sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward. He said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make known today that you are God in Israel and that I'm your servant and have done all these things by your instructions.

<sup>37</sup> Answer me, LORD! Answer me! Then these people will know that you, LORD, are God and that you are winning back their hearts."

<sup>38</sup> So a fire from the LORD fell down and consumed the burnt offering, wood, stones, and dirt. The fire even dried up the water that was in the trench.

<sup>39</sup> All the people saw it and immediately bowed down to the ground. "The LORD is God!" they said. "The LORD is God!"

<sup>40</sup> Elijah told them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let any of them escape." The people seized them, and Elijah took them to the Kishon River and slaughtered them there.

**Theme: God is holy and righteous. He demands death as the payment for sin.**

Elijah has them pour water on the sacrifice three times to show that God can start a fire even when the wood is soaking wet. Then, Elijah begins to pray. Suddenly, fire descends from heaven and consumes the sacrifice. It is a fantastic victory for God and Elijah. All the people acknowledge that "The Lord, He is God!" At Elijah's command, all the prophets of Baal are seized and killed. Elijah then runs faster than Ahab's chariot back to the royal city of Jezreel where he tells everyone the news. Jezebel, who is fed up with Elijah's "God-talk" and angry over the loss of her prophets, vows to kill Elijah. Remarkably, the man who just stood up to the prophets of Baal, runs for his life.

## **D. The Lord Speaks to Elijah**

**Theme: God communicates with man.**

Elijah travels south to Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses Israel's law. Along the way, Elijah is miraculously sustained for 40 days without food.

At Mount Horeb, Elijah experiences an earthquake, a great wind, and fire, which is also reminiscent of what the Israelites experienced here when Moses met with God. However, God is said not to be in any of these phenomena.

The reason? Because these phenomena are too closely associated with the storm god, Baal. God, therefore reveals Himself to Elijah in the sound of a thin whisper. Then, God asks Elijah “What are you doing here?” Without waiting for an answer, God tells Elijah to perform three tasks:

- Anoint an Israelite military commander named Jehu as Israel’s king
- Anoint the next kin of Israel’s neighbor, Aram
- Appoint Elisha as his successor

## E. Passing the Torch to Elisha

Elijah eventually finds Elisha, and they travel together for a short time. Wanting some privacy from an entourage of prophets who are following them, Elijah takes off his cloak and touches the Jordan River, which miraculously parts so they can cross over (again, a miracle similar to Moses’ parting of the Red Sea). On the other side of the Jordan, Elijah says farewell to his friend, and a fiery chariot descends from heaven and takes Elijah away in a whirlwind.

Now, traveling solo, Elisha crosses back over the Jordan River into Israel and picks up where Elijah left off. He works wonders on behalf of God. Among Elisha’s miracles are a floating axe-head, getting two bears to maul 42 youths for making fun of his baldness, multiplying food, and reviving a dead man. Ahab, Elijah’s old nemesis, dies in battle and just as Elijah had predicted, dogs lick his blood.

**Remember that God had declared that there were 7,000 persons in Israel who had not worshipped Baal during that very wicked time (1 Kings 19:18).** And that is true today. No matter how evil this nation or world is becoming; no matter what temptations you may be facing; no matter how many of those around you are giving in and just going with the flow, God says that “there were 7,000 people in Israel during the time of Baal worship, during the time of Ahab and Jezebel, who had not bowed down to the false gods of Baal.

The shrines of pagan worship may not be as visible in a basically Christian-professing society, and there may be very few carved images that people actually worship, yet millions are following after the gods of this world. Today’s idols can be riches, fame, pleasure and the pleasant-sounding fables that occupy the hearts and minds of many who are unwilling and disinterested in learning about God.

The question posed to both you and as well as myself: Will you be one who is standing fast and not giving in? We can’t do it in our own strength. We can only stand fast as we put our faith and trust in Almighty God, El-Shaddai, the One True God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Remember the theme: **Man must have faith in order to please God and be saved.**

**Next time: Lesson 35: The Excellent Adventures of Elijah and Elisha continued**

Now let’s review today’s lesson:

### Questions for Review:

1. Which husband and wife duo are said to be the most vilified and evil rulers in the Bible? **Ahab and Jezebel.**
2. Amos 3:7 says that surely God does nothing without revealing his \_\_\_\_\_ to his prophets. **Secrets.**



3. Who confronts Ahab and Jezebel after they have executed their neighbor Naboth and stolen his property? **Elijah.**
4. What does Elijah tell Ahab will happen to him as God's judgment on his sin? **In the same place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up Ahab's blood.**
5. Did this happen? **Yes**
6. When God commanded Elijah to visit the widow of Zarephath, He said that she would provide for him. What was the widow's financial situation at the time of Elijah's visit? **She was poor and only had enough food for one more meal. Then, she and her son were going to prepare to die.**
7. Why did Elijah ask her to make a meal for him using the last of her ingredients? Wasn't this selfish? **No, it was a test of her faith and as she obeyed, using the last of what she had to give to the man of God, she was blessed and her grain and oil was multiplied so that it lasted throughout the drought.**
8. When Elijah calls for a contest between himself and the 850 false prophets of Baal and Asherah, what does say to the prophets as they are trying to get their gods to answer and do something? **He ridicules them and mocks their gods, saying that maybe they are asleep, or going to the bathroom or away on a trip and can't answer.**
9. What does Elijah do to the sacrifice to show that God can do the impossible and that nothing is too hard for the Lord? **He orders water poured on the sacrifice three times to show that God can set fire to wood that is totally soaked.**
10. When Elijah travels to Mount Horeb, how does God speak to him? **In a small whisper.**
11. During this time of evil, did God know those who had not bowed down to worship the gods of Baal and Asherah? **Yes**
12. How many refused to bow down to worship the false gods of Baal and Asherah? **7000.**

