

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL PROPHETS AND KINGS GOD THE REVEALER

The God Who Answers with Fire

Sometimes as we are reading the stories of the Kings and Prophets in the Old Testament, we may not immediately understand how they chronologically fit together. Some of the events in **1 and 2 Kings** are repeated in **1 and 2 Chronicles**. However, half of the information found in the **Chronicles** is unique. When the **Chronicles** were translated into the Greek around 300 BC, its title translates into “The Books of Things Left Out,” referring to additional details surrounding the historical events recorded in the books of **Samuel** and **Kings**. Jewish tradition claims that Ezra the priest compiled the **Chronicles** for the exiles returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Due to the Judean emphasis of the **1 and 2 Chronicles**, we learn much more about the Southern Kingdom of Judah and its kings. The books of **1 and 2 Kings** contain more detail about the Northern kingdom of Israel.

The family of Jacob had always been divided – a family of 12 sons who just did not get along and those divisions continued even after the kingdom was first established under King Saul. During our study of the life of Solomon, we learned the fate of the nation when Solomon turned his heart away from God. **1 Kings 11:11-13 (ESV)** ¹¹ *Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, “...I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. ¹² ... I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ ... but I will give one tribe to your son...”* After the death of Solomon, the nation split very quickly – ten tribes remained known as Israel (the Northern Kingdom) with the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin forming the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom declined more rapidly than the Southern Kingdom since some of the kings of Judah did seek the LORD. Over the next three months, we will look at some of the prophets and kings. Although we will not study all them, I have attached a chart of the prophets and the kings to which they prophesied to help us better understand. Our study begins in the nation of Israel with King Ahab and the prophet Elijah.

Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, was reared in Sidon, a commercial city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, known for its idolatry and vice. When she married Ahab and moved to Jezreel, a city that served the LORD, she decided to turn it into a city that worshiped Baal, a Phoenician god. Baal was represented by a bull symbolizing strength and fertility; his worshippers falsely considered him the god of the rains and harvest.

The Israelites were continually attracted to Baal worship, in which prostitution played a large part. According to **2 Kings 10:18**, King Ahab served Baal a little. Ahab saw no harm in participating in the religion of his neighbors, particularly the religion of his wife. Therefore, he established a center of Baal worship at Samaria. The wicked, idolatrous queen soon became the power behind the throne.

It was in the midst of this heathen environment that Elijah, the Tishbite of Gilead was called to prophesy for Yahweh. Elijah was a complex man of the desert who prophesied to kings. His first miracle was associated with his prophecy to King Ahab. **1 Kings 17:1 (ESV)** ¹ *Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”* This prediction of a drought was punishment against King Ahab for building a temple for Baal worship in Samaria. Immediately after the prophecy for no rain, Elijah went to the brook Cherith where ravens fed him as the surrounding land began to dry up. After the drought had lasted three years, the Lord instructed Elijah to present himself before Ahab and announce that the Lord would provide rain again. However, even after three years, Ahab still chose to blame someone other than himself for Israel’s troubles. He chose Elijah.

What happened next reminds us that the God who answers with fire is deserving of our loyalty.

Read 1 Kings 18:17-19 (ESV) ¹⁷ *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?”* ¹⁸ *And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.* ¹⁹ *Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”*

Ahab plays the blame game by calling Elijah the troublemaker in Israel when it was actually Ahab as king of Israel who had brought the trouble upon the land. Surely Ahab knew the terms of the covenant and understood that the blessings of the LORD depended on the obedience of the king and his people. Instead of abandoning sin, the King and his people had abandoned the commandments of the LORD.

Read 1 Kings 18:20-24 (ESV) ²⁰ *So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.* ²¹ *And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.* ²² *Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.* ²³ *Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.* ²⁴ *And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”*

Mt. Carmel located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea long held significance for worshipers of Yahweh and worshipers of Baal. What better place to decide who the true God is!!! Atop Mt. Carmel, Elijah’s greatest public miracle and testimony to the power of God was about to take place. The 400 prophets of the goddess, Asherah, Baal’s make-believe consort, apparently did not show up. As it turns out that was probably a good move on their part. However, Elijah and his God were still pitted against the 450 prophets of Baal. Is there strength in numbers? Not necessarily – not if God is not on your side! **Romans 8:31 (ESV)** ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

The KJV translates Elijah's question: *How long halt ye between two opinions?* David Jeremiah in his study Bible comments, "No place in the Word of God is there room for a middle-of-the-road position." However, vacillating between two opinions is something most of us do at times. We read a passage of scripture, hear a sermon or have a special prayer time and feel secure that God is powerful enough to solve our problems. Then moments later, we find ourselves wondering, planning, and fretting over what we 'going to do' to solve those problems we just committed to the LORD!

The contest was simple – each would pray to their God – be it Baal or Yahweh, and the real God would send fire from heaven to light the wood on the altar. The God who answers with fire is different from false gods.

Read 1 Kings 18:25-29 (ESV) ²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." ²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. ²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Since Baal was the storm or weather god, theoretically it should not have been a problem to send a little lightning from heaven to start a fire especially when the earth was so dry from the lack of rain for three years. Of course, the imaginary Baal could not light a fire but that did not stop the people from cutting themselves in order to get his attention. Self-mutilation was a common practice among false religions. In fact, the LORD made a law against it in **Leviticus 19:28**. In the New Testament cutting oneself was associated with demon possession. It was written of the demon possessed man who Jesus would heal in **Mark 5:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.*

In our times sadly some people still mutilate their own bodies. There's no one single or simple cause that leads someone to self-injure. And I would not even guess at the many reasons why people use this method to cope with the pain of life. But, I know for sure, God's Son shed His blood for us. In **John 19:30**, we read the words of Jesus, "It is finished". We do not need to mutilate ourselves to get God's attention. He has promised :*"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* (**Heb. 13:5**)

Elijah weighed the contest in the Baal prophets favor; but, that didn't keep him from taunting them a little. The prophets pleaded all day and did everything they could to get Baal to light their fire. It is often said, "if that doesn't light your fire, then your wood must be wet." For the prophets of Baal their wood was dry but it would not ignite. Since with God all things are possible, Elijah was about to make sure Yahweh's wood was wet! The God who answers with fire is destined to receive glory.

Read 1 Kings 18:30-35 (ESV) ³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” ³⁴ And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

There had been an altar to Yahweh on Mt. Carmel but it had been thrown down (probably by Jezebel’s prophets of Baal). Even though Elijah was a prophet to Israel, he used 12 stones representing all of the 12 tribes even though Israel now only consisted of ten tribes. This was an affirmation of their spiritual unity even in the absence of their political disunity. Elijah gave the Baal prophets some advantages, so now he gave Yahweh some ‘handicaps’. He had a trench dug around the altar and filled it with water. He put the sacrifice on the wood on the altar and had everything drenched with water. **Hebrews 12:29 (ESV)** ²⁹ *for our God is a consuming fire.*

Read 1 Kings 18:36-39 (ESV) ³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

God chose to show them in an extraordinary way that He was God and Baal was NOT. The fire from heaven revealed the power of the One True and Living God of the Storm responding to his humble servant who prayed that God would be made known. The people fell on their faces and acknowledged the reality of Elijah’s God. Shortly after that, Elijah prayed and the rains came to a dry and thirsty land.

We are living in a drought in our nation. Yes, many parts of the country are physically flooded but the drought is spiritual. Most of the nation does not even realize the source of our problems – which is the turning of our nation to the gods of this world. **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *if 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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* Let’s be like Elijah and pray that the fire of the Holy Spirit will come down from heaven and touch our land.

18 • The Prophets of the Old Testament (870 BC – 465 BC)

Prophet*	Propheesied	Kings Who Ruled During Prophet's Time	Approximate Date (bc)	Prophet's Place of Birth
Elijah	To Israel	Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram	870-845	Tishbe
Elisha	To Israel	Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz	845-800	Abel Meholah
Isaiah	To Judah	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	760-673	Jerusalem
Jeremiah	To Judah	Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	650-582	Anathoth
Ezekiel	To Exiles in Babylon	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, Babylonian Exile	620-570	Jerusalem
Daniel	To Exiles in Babylon	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, Babylonian Exile	620-540	Judah (Jerusalem?)
Hosea	To Israel	Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	758-725	Israel
Joel	To Judah	Governor Ezra	450	Jerusalem
Amos	To Israel	Jeroboam II	765-754	Tekoa**
Obadiah	Concerning Edom	Zedekiah	590	Jerusalem
Jonah	To Nineveh	Jeroboam II	781	Gath Hepher**
Micah	To Judah	Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	738-698	Moresbeth-gath**
Nahum	Concerning Nineveh	Manasseh, Amon, Josiah	658-615	Elkosh**
Habakkuk	To Judah	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin	608-598	Unknown
Zephaniah	To Judah	Amon, Josiah	640-626	Unknown
Haggai	To Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	520	Jerusalem
Zechariah	To Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	522-509	Jerusalem
Malachi	To Judah	Governor Zerubbabel	465	Jerusalem

* Prophets are listed in the order they are found in the Bible.

** Exact location unknown.