

1 Kings 16-18 - If the Lord is God

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

1 Kings chapter 16. We are focusing mostly here on the kings of Israel not the kings of Judah. Although, it will mention the king of Judah. But the kings that we're going to be reading about in this chapter took place all during the reign of king Asa of Judah. And he had a long reign. All we hear about king Asa is that these guys came up during his reign.

By the way, if you ever want to try to remember the number of good kings versus the number of bad kings. If you want to remember how many good kings there were in the northern kingdom of Israel, it's real easy. There were none. There were zero good kings. They were all bad kings. And I'm talking after the split.

The split you'll remember took place during David's grandson, Rehoboam. And after that point, Jeroboam became the first God picked king of Israel. And he turned out to be a major loser. And he began a process of paganism and man-made religion that really just brought the kingdom to its knees and continued on in that same vein. And all the kings, for the most part, followed in the ways of Jeroboam. Doesn't mean God didn't use some of them because He did, and we're going to see that in this chapter.

But they were not good kings. And one of the things the Lord said to Jeroboam, who was again, the first king of the northern split, which they called the kingdom of Israel. God said to him, eventually someday your whole family is going to get wiped out. And that happened during the kingship, or the reign of a man named Baasha. And we talked about that last week. And Baasha is now king and he too, is going to be judged for his atrocities.

Look at verse 1, and it tells us here that, *"And the word of the LORD came to Jehu (He's a prophet. He's) the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 "Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, 3 behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dog shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat." (ESV)*

And that's the exact same thing that God said to Jeroboam. Now He's saying it to Baasha, who the Lord used to bring judgment upon the house of Jeroboam. But the man Baasha never gave his heart to God and now he too is being judged for his atrocities. I don't know if that weirds out your theology or not to see God using ungodly people. But it's replete within the pages of Scripture.

I mean, there are many instances of God... Well, let's face it, God uses Satan. I mean, I hope that doesn't tweak you on that one either. But He does. God uses Satan. God uses Satan for His purposes. And that doesn't make God evil. It means that God will utilize the hearts of anyone to bring about His purpose.

We see it not only among men, but we see it even, in the Book of Job. We see the Lord giving permission to Satan to do, and allow to do certain things to the life of Job. Which for any other redemptive purpose would seem like great cruelty. But there was redemptive purpose in it. God has very clear redemptive purposes in what He is doing in the life of the man Job. And you have to see that in the book, otherwise, it's just an exercise in confusion.

And for a lot of people it is. You read through the Book of Job and it's like... In fact, I remember years - many years ago, I was brand new in the Lord. And I had this guy come up to me. And he was asking me about the Book of Job. And frankly, I didn't - I'm not sure I even had read it at that point.

And he came up to me and he was like, I was reading through the Book of Job. And I just like don't get it. Is that what God's all about? Just playing mind games between Him and the devil. And just using us as pawns to just see how much we'll squirm or this or that? And he was really troubled by the Book of Job.

And, like I said, I'm not sure I'd even read it at that point. And I was trying my best to defend God. Well, big idiot that I was. Didn't know a thing about it. But even after I've read it and taught through the Book of Job several times. It's still tweaks people. Unless you understand God's redemptive purpose. Unless you understand that God uses even those who are evil to bring about His purpose.

And there's something comforting about that. I mean, good grief! We just read that verse in Romans just last Sunday that, God works all things together for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

And we know that some of the things that go on in our lives are flat out evil. And yet the promise is, God will use them for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. And that includes, the actions.

Hey, think about Peter. God allowed Satan to sift Peter as wheat. Was that for... Was there a redemptive purpose in that? Or was God just toying with Peter? Of course there was a redemptive purpose. (Luke 22:31)

What about Paul's thorn in his flesh? He called it a, "*messenger of Satan.*" And yet, was there a redemptive value in what God allowed come into Paul's life through that? Of course there was. Paul even explained it to us in 2 Corinthians 12. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

We're not weirded out when we find out that this man Baasha was used of God to bring judgment upon the house of Jeroboam for his sin. And then God turned right around and judged Baasha because he never repented of his own sin. In fact, followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam and now is dealing with the same kind of judgment that had come upon Jeroboam.

It says in verse 5, "*Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 6 And Baasha slept with his fathers and was buried (in) Tirzah, and Elah his son reigned in his place.*

And we're told here almost as kind of a parenthetical comment, "*7 Moreover, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.*" Isn't that interesting?

Now we see, "*8 In the twenty-six year of Asa king of Judah, (And that's just simply a way of marking the date.) Elah the son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah, and he reigned two years. 9 But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him. (And) When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was over the household in Tirzah, 10 Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place.*"

Now we're seeing this succession of monarchies rising in Israel simply because they know how to assassinate someone. That's how much now the kingdom of Israel has tumbled into chaos and there's no order and there's no godliness. And

this paganistic way of thinking is now overtaking the way they do life in every capacity, including how they run the country. Isn't this just delightful?

And this man named Zimri waits for the point when this Elah is just good and liquored up, and he goes in and he kills him. And he makes himself king and all this happened in the 27th year of Asa.

And then look what it says in verse 11. *"When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he struck down all the house of Baasha."* Now that's, in keeping with the prophecy made. Right? By Jehu that we just read about here at the beginning of the chapter.

It says *"He did not leave... a single male of his relatives or his friends."* Wow! That's... He not only killed all of his family, but even his friends. If you're a friend of the former king this guy is going to kill you.

"¹² Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, ¹³ for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, which they sinned and which they made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their idols. ¹⁴ Now the rest of the acts of Elah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?" Again, just this crazy succession of kings in Israel.

It says now, *"¹⁵ In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned (get this,) seven days (That's got to be a long reign here in the records of the annals. It says,) in Tirzah. Now (It tells us here why.) the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which (by the way) belonged (at that time) to the Philistines, ¹⁶ and the troops who were encamped (there, that the word got around to them. They) heard (that) it (was) said, "Zimri (who of course was one of their commanders) has conspired, and he has killed the king." Therefore (apparently they didn't like Zimri very much.) They all made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp."*

Isn't that interesting? Zimri probably wasn't a well-liked guy. He was a commander of half of the king's chariots. And yet when he assassinated the king and forced himself onto the throne, everybody said, he's not getting to be king. And they actually just crowned another king within one week's time of Zimri taking the throne but Zimri was there long enough to accomplish God's purpose, which was to wipe out the family of Baasha in accordance with the prophecy made about him.

It says in verse 17 that "...*Omri went up from Gibbethon, (and again, he was the commander of all the army) and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah.*
18 And when Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king's house and (he) burned the king's house over him with fire and died,
19 because of his sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for his sin which he committed, making Israel to sin." Even a week. Wow!

And "*20 ...the rest of the acts of Zimri, (I don't know what there else is to write about within a context of a week but apparently the rest of the acts of Zimri) and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?"*

And then it says... But see it doesn't mean everybody's fat and happy now. "*21 Then (it says) the people of Israel (eventually became) ...divided into two parts. Half of the people followed (this other guy,) Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king, and (then) half followed Omri, (who was of course, the, commander of the armies.) 22 But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni the son of Ginath (That's not surprising since Omri was the commander of the army he's got the military might on his side. Right? So there's really no big surprise there.) So Tibni died, and Omri became king."*

Now can I stop you there just for a moment because I need to give you a little information about this guy named Omri. And he's not... He doesn't end up being a good king. Like I said, there's no such thing as a good king in Israel. But I need to mention here, that with Omri, and the crowning of Omri, a change begins to take place in Israel. Not for the good. But a change nonetheless.

And Omri is the very first king in Israel who creates a lasting family dynasty on the throne of Israel that lasted actually for four kings. And that was huge. It will be Omri, followed by his son Ahab; (nothing to do with whales) Ahaziah and Jeroboam who are the men in Omri's family.

And although the family of Omri produce some really significant leaders in Israel. I mean, they were good leaders. They had a leadership gift. They were good leaders from the standpoint of their secular sort of work that they did. But they were all a disaster in terms of the spiritual integrity of the nation of Israel.

They would all - all of them - be responsible for bringing Israel into even a greater time of crisis. And you probably know that about Ahab. He's the famous one who of course, marries Jezebel. We'll get into that in just a little bit.

But the reign and the dynasty of Omri, was so significant that the ministries of Elijah and Elisha are almost singularly focused toward providing opposition against these four men. Isn't that crazy? I mean, they were so evil, they were so ungodly, that God raised up two of the greatest prophets who ever lived and walked upon the face of the earth just to oppose these men. And what they were doing and what they were bringing Israel into. Which of course was unparalleled Baal worship.

Anyway, let's keep reading. *"In the (verse 23) thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah,"* Judah is experiencing a time of prosperity and stuff under king Asa. It says, *"In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for twelve years; six years he reigned in Tizrah."*

But then it says, in verse 24, *"He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and he fortified the hill and called the name of the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill."*

Stop there again with you if you would just for a moment. This is just one of the things that Omri accomplished in the nation of Israel. And this is pretty huge you guys, just historically speaking. Because during the midpoint in his reign, Omri, he actually moved his capital city from Tirzah to a town that he named Samaria after the previous owner. And it sounds like he got the place for a steal but it was on a hill.

And of course, a hill is always a more defensible location. And Samaria proved to be a very defensible location for the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. And you know that after the northern kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Assyrian army, it becomes known as Samaria. It was... Samaria began as the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel.

But when Israel went away, they no longer called it Israel. They called it Samaria. And by the time of Jesus, it was the nation or the country of Samaria. And the Samaritans, as you know, were despised by the Jews. Because they were half breeds. Part Jew, but greatly mixed by other Gentile races.

But Samaria - and this is also important. As I said, Omri was a good leader and so were his sons. He made Samaria into a very beautiful and very prosperous city during the time of his reign I think from a purely secular standpoint. If you'd been living during the time of king Omri, even though paganism was rampant, and God was not happy with the way things were. If you were looking at this place with just purely secular eyes, you would say, we got ourselves a

king because the city is prospering. It's beautiful. It's been built up from nothing. And Omri is largely to credit for that sort of a thing.

It's interesting, we read these things. We read about these kings. And we read about how nasty they were and how ungodly they were. And we assume that the culture in which they lived was just as nasty and ungodly. Well, from a spiritual standpoint, it was. From a secular standpoint, people were probably enjoying sometime of prosperity, and beauty, and culture. And we forget that.

And we look at it just from our perspective of just reading the text. And we think, oh, those people, didn't they know better? Well, it depends on what eyes they were looking with.

And it's the same thing with the United States of America. How are we doing as a country? Well, it depends on which eyes you're looking through. Are you looking through spiritual eyes? You're looking through just physical eyes? Well, I guess we're... Looks like we're doing okay. We're still on the top of the heap, as it were, in terms of our military strength. And we're considered the greatest world power. But is that the way God sees it? Is that the way God sees the United States of America? I dare say not.

We know how God saw the northern kingdom of Israel. It says it right here. It was very, very grieved by the way they were worshiping other gods. But like I said, you look at it with different eyes.

Oh, and speaking of Omri too, the Assyrians who would later conquer Israel, they actually referred to the northern kingdom of Israel or Samaria, if you will - they referred to it as, the land of Omri. That's how well known and how powerfully established this man's reign became through himself and his sons.

Verse 25. Look with me there in your Bible. But here's what...Here's God's perspective, *"Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, (and look at this) and did more evil than all who were before him. (Why?) 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, (who became the standard for sin) and in the sins that he made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the might that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 28 And Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab his son reigned in his place."*

Oh joy. Now we come to Ahab. *"29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of*

Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. (That's a long time.) ³⁰ *And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD,...* In fact, we're told he even outdid his dad. It says here, *"more than all who were before him."* Ahab now has the prize in God's eyes, of actually leading the people into more sin than any of his predecessors.

Verse 31 says, *"And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, (He did this further grievous thing.) he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him."* Stop there for just a moment, please.

Now, again, depending on what eyes you look through this was a grievous thing to do, or it was a really smart thing to do. Politically speaking, this was a smart thing to do. Why? Because Israel was no doubt having border tuffles with the Phoenician army. And what better way to get rid of all those issues than to take the daughter of the king as his own wife. And they did that back in those days. Even Solomon married an Egyptian woman. No doubt, politically motivated just as a bond of peace between the two nations.

And from the standpoint of just secular thinking, you see this marriage between Ahab and Jezebel, you think, this is a smart move. Because not only is he going to quell any fires that might have been raging on the border between Israel and Phoenicia, but now he has an ally. When somebody comes against him, I can just go to my pop-in-law and just say, hey, bud, we're getting hassled here by one of our neighbors. How about we rally our armies together and come against these guys collectively. Yeah, no problem.

This was a smart political move but this was a grievous spiritual move. Because Jezebel brought into the country a zealously toward Baal worship that was unprecedented up to this point. And we're going to find out as we get into the next chapter, that not only did she worship Baal, but she went around systematically murdering the prophets of the Lord. She was not going to put up with any kind of opposition as it relates to her own form of worship.

Verse 32 tells us that, *"Ahab also erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built (there) in (the city of) Samaria.* ³³ *And Ahab made an Asherah. (meaning an Asherah pole, look at this; just repeating it, in case we didn't get it the first time.) Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him."*

And then we have this curious note right here at the end of the chapter. It says that, *"³⁴ In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. (And that should be rebuilt*

Jericho. Because you remember, it was devastated by who? Joshua. Right? And the armies of Israel when they came into the land. Remember it was the first city that fell. But it says this man rebuilt it. And he did it, *"He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."*

Now, for those of you who need a reminder maybe about this particular thing. It was 500 years before, that Joshua, you'll remember had pronounced a curse over the city of Jericho when it was devastated, saying that whoever attempted to rebuild it would do so at the expense of his own sons. In fact, I'll put the actual word here on the screen for you. From Joshua chapter 6, it says,

Joshua 6:26 (ESV)

Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates."

Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates."

And yet, even though it says that Joshua laid this oath on them, as we look in 1 Kings here, we see that the writer of 1 Kings wants you and I to know, that was not just a random word of a man. It calls it *"the word of the LORD."* In other words, Joshua was speaking prophetically from the voice of God at that time. And it was not just a random comment made by a man.

Chapter 17. *"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." Stop there, please, if you would, for a moment.*

This is what's really fascinating about this section, as we get into chapter 17 here, is that the author of the book makes a significant change in the writing of 1 and 2 Kings. Because from this chapter in 1 Kings through the 9th chapter of 2 Kings...

And you would say, what's Kings all about? Well, it's about the Kings, hence the name. But again, from here to the 9th chapter of 2nd Kings, the central

figures are Elijah and Elisha. And they make up the focal point of the narrative in a very dramatic sort of a way.

In the midst of this horrific slide toward paganism and the deterioration of the spiritual health of the nation of Israel, what happens? God raises up two of the most amazing prophets who are ever to live upon the face of the earth. And brings them to the front and center on the stage of Israel - the nation of Israel. And I find this tremendously encouraging living in the United States of America at a time when we too, have seen a tremendous spiritual slide in our country.

And lest we begin to think that all is lost, we are reminded of the fact that God is in control. And God can raise up whom He will. And God can move upon the hearts of men as He wishes. And this is a delightful reminder for you and I, that God is not without resources.

The spiritual depravity of the nation of Israel did not limit God in any way in bringing about the most powerful prophetic ministries of these two men at this particular time in history. And I find it so fascinating that in order to combat the issues of the day, God didn't raise up an army, or an organization, I guess, for that matter, to combat these things. He raised up two humble prophets.

And the word that Elijah speaks here in verse 1, is a word of judgment. He sends the word to Ahab. And isn't it interesting that as quickly as Elijah jumps onto the scene, he's going to leave the scene for a 3 year period. But he pops his head out of absolutely nowhere. And he says to Ahab, oh, by the way, it's not going to rain around here, except at my word.

And then it says in verse 2, *"And the word of the LORD came to him: 3 "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook of Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the brook, ... I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."* How incredibly cool is this: Pop your head up out of nowhere and say, it isn't going to rain except when I say so. And then you're gone for 3 years - just gone.

And so it says, *"5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. (And) He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook."*

Can you imagine what it would be like for that period of time to be fed by birds? How they did this? We have absolutely no idea. But I can imagine. In my

mind, I suppose, put a little CGI in there and we got birds feeding men. But it's... I mean, it's something. Today we would have to do through computer generated sort of stuff.

But this really took place. God fed this man, sustained this man by the birds. It's crazy. But it says in verse 7 that, *"After a while the brook dried up, ...no rain..."* Verse 8. *"Then the word of the LORD came to him, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there."* Now stop for just a moment.

This is crazy! This it's like, God, I think You finally flipped here. Because... Go to Zarephath? Do you know where Zarephath is? It's a stone's throw from where Jezebel's dad is ruling and reigning. Jezebel is inside. And it's in the area of Phoenicia. This is under his reign. Basically what God is telling Elijah to do is go live on Jezebel's daddy's doorstep. Just go hang out there for a while. Not only that...

Well, you know what? In fact, there are 3 things that would have made this a very strange thing. But you'll notice here I stopped in the middle of verse 9. Here's what God says to him. *"Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you."* Now that's crazy, too! But he says in verse 10, *"So he arose and went to Zarephath."*

Now there are 3 things about this command from the Lord that I think must have sounded very strange to Elijah. And would have called upon him to exercise faith. One, is that he is literally told to go to the center of Baal worship. Okay. Here's a man who is given by God this calling of opposing Baal worship. And combating a king of Israel who is into Baal worship. And God tells him during this time of hiding to go right on to Jezebel's daddy's doorstep and hang out there.

Second thing, he tells him to travel. And he - if you look at a map - he would have had to travel across the heart of Israel to get there. In other words, he's got to come out of hiding in order to walk in the open to go to this place.

And thirdly, he told him to find a widow. Now, I don't know, maybe after being by birds for this period of time, nothing sounds too strange anymore. But you don't usually go to a widow to get things from. Because they don't have any resources. In fact, during that time, widows were dependent on other people to live. Literally to live. And you can see that this is hardly the place that a person in their mind would go and look for help.

Don't you love though the way God works? I mean, this passage of Scripture just reminds you and I, of something. If we're going to try to figure this thing out with our brains, we are in a world of hurt. If we're going to try to figure out this life with my brain, your brain, we are in trouble. Because we're not going to follow the plan of the Lord.

God's plan is usually ridiculous. Go to the center of Baal worship, walk across Israel, you've had me in hiding all this time. And then go see a widow? Who probably has like nothing. God says, yeah, that's what I want you to do.

Do you understand people that the word of the Lord often makes no logical sense from an earthly perspective? I mean, have you ever thought of... Ever read through the Bible and just seen how many times God gave people commands that from a human perspective, would have landed you in a padded cell with one of those neat little white jackets that ties in the back. Because they just sound crazy.

Well, we're in the middle of verse 10. *"And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me (a little vessel or excuse me,) a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."* Now, again, there's a drought going on - a huge drought. And we're going to find out here that it's even affecting the nation of Phoenicia.

But you might say why didn't the woman just say to him, hey, listen, pal. Are you new in the area? Don't you know it hasn't rained here for a long time? In the Middle East, if somebody came and asked you for a drink of water you were duty bound by just the laws of hospitality to just take care of them.

"And (it says in verse 11 that) as she was going to bring it, he called ...her..." And asked for something further. He said, *"Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."* And she turned around ¹² *And she said, (listen) "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, (right now) only a handful of flour in a jar and (just) a little (bit of) oil in a jug. And now I am gathering (just) a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."*

It sounds like she's putting poison in it so that... But no, it's a phrase to say, this is our last meal. I'm going to go prepare what little I have so that we can eat it and after that we're just planning on starving to death. And that was her position. She had no one to help her. Right?

This is the widow that God called upon to help Elijah during this time of famine. God called upon a woman who had nothing to offer. When's the last time you looked at what you could do in the kingdom of God and you thought, I have nothing to give? Yeah, you're just the person God's looking for. Because when you have nothing in your hands, they're open for God to put His resources in those same hands.

Chances are, if you've got a lot of things in your hands, it's going to be tougher for God to put His stuff there. Because we've become pretty self-sufficient thinking we've got everything dialed in.

But I love the fact that God calls upon this woman, this widow, this pagan to be His vehicle of sustaining the prophet Elijah. She has nothing except an outlook that death is very near. A death by slow starvation.

And verse 13 says, *"And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son."* What the... That's just the audacity. Do you see what he's saying?

He said, I know... I understand you just have a little bit left, but just make... go ahead and go in and bake it. Oh and bring the first part to me. It sounds like a man with guts. Either that or a really dumb one.

But do you understand what he's doing in this woman's life? Do you understand the call to faith? The call to put your faith in God? And God asks us for the first offering. The first; not the leftover. Don't give God your leftovers. That was always the principle, that giving to the Lord was based upon, give God first and your best. Right? Not just the first, but your best.

And in keeping with this principle of drawing this woman to a place of putting her faith in God. He says, no, it's fine. You go ahead and just cook what little you got left. Oh, and bring me the first bread that comes out of the oven. And then afterwards you and your son go ahead and have a little something for yourself. Yeah. You got to be surprised almost that the woman didn't just go, humph!, and walk away.

He is asking her to risk her last meal for an unknown prophet who serves a foreign God. Notice she doesn't call his God, her God. She says, by your God, as surely as your God lives. That was asking a lot. And yet, somehow, some way, faith rises up in this woman.

In verse 15, we're told, *"...she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 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."*

Isn't that amazing? Day by day, the Lord provided, day by day. And it doesn't mean that, when she went back to look at her jar of flour it was full to the brim and overflowing. It doesn't mean that when she looked at her jar of oil, it was like, oh wow, where'd all this come from? It doesn't mean that. It means that every day she got out the jar to make a little bread and there was always some left.

And that again is a principle of how God provides. Weren't we told to pray, give us this day, our daily bread, not this week or this month. (Matthew 6:11) God wants us to come to him with an attitude of dependence on a daily basis. So give us this day.

Now there's kind of an interesting story here at the end of this chapter, which says that, *"17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. (And of course, that's just a very fine way of saying he died.) 18 And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!"*

By the way, that is a very pagan way of thinking. She is showing her true colors as a pagan here to think that his presence there would have been to remind his God of her sins. And therefore to do this sort of a thing.

"19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. 20 And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son? (And) 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again. 22 And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived."

Oh, by the way, you might find it interesting to note that this is the very first instance in the Bible where someone is raised to life after experiencing death; very first instance.

"²³ And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives."²⁴ And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

Apparently maybe there had been some doubt about that in this woman up to this point. What is also very interesting to me is that here is Elijah living on the doorstep, literally in the center of Baal territory. And yet we see God working powerfully and miraculously in the midst of this very dark time. Right?

Chapter 18. *"After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." (That's an important promise of the LORD.)² So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria.³ And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly,⁴ and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.)"*

Which, as you can imagine, would have been no small task to feed a hundred people. And to hide them away. And to do it at a time when, had he been discovered, this would have been a certain death for Obadiah. I mean, this was an open defiance. This man, Obadiah, is a godly man.

"⁵ And Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through(out) the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. (At least where there used to be water.) Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals."

By the way, Ahab isn't concerned about animals. Horses and mules were the determining factor of a man's military strength. He's simply trying to retain his military ability.

And it says, *"⁶ So they divided the land between them to pass through it. (And) Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.*

⁷ And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"⁸ And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'"⁹ And he said, (and this is a fairly long excuse for not doing it right away. But it says, "And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?"¹⁰ As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or

kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here, he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you.

11 And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" *12 And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you (I do) I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth.* *13 Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?* *14 And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"; ...he will kill me."*

Interesting, isn't it? Obadiah is brave enough to defy the queen and hide these prophets in caves. And yet when Elijah tells him, hey, go tell the king that I'm here, he's afraid. And he's greatly afraid and he says no.

"15 And Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today. (And that was enough for Obadiah.)16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. (And) 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

Stop there for a moment. Because the word, "troubler" is an interesting one. It doesn't just mean somebody who causes trouble. It is actually a very interesting Hebrew word which describes not only someone to blame for what is currently going on. But it suggests the idea that the solution to the problem is for you to die. In other words, troubler means, you are the one who's responsible. And it is only by your death that this is going to be taken care of.

"18 And he answered, (this is Elijah speaking now,) "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."

20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel."

You might kind of ask yourself... Stop just please for a moment. You might ask yourself the question: Why would Ahab even bite at this challenge to go gather all the prophets? Well, first of all, you need to understand that Mount Carmel was often claimed by the pagans as the home of the gods.

And for a long time, it was associated with the worship of Baal. And so what Elijah is doing here is he's essentially giving Baal, or the prophets of Baal, the home court advantage. And essentially saying to them, we'll do it at this location. Because you have to understand to pagans, location is everything. They consider location to be very key. Because in pagan thought, there are gods who are stronger in one location than another. And we've talked about this before. That was just pagan thinking.

They already... And Elijah knew they saw Mount Carmel as a pagan stronghold. And he when he suggests they go to Mount Carmel and gather there, it kind of plays right into Ahab's thinking, ha ha ha Mount Carmel. You want to meet on Mount Carmel? No problem sucker. We'll just meet on Mount Carmel. And you are dog meat. Right? I mean, he's just thinking, this is perfect! He is playing into our hands."

Verse 21. *"And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between you 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."*

Now, you can tell from his comments here that the worship of Yahweh had not been completely abandoned. How do you know that? Because he's saying, how long are you going to vacillate? How long are you going to vacillate between the worship of God and the worship of Baal?

You can see that the people wanted to have their cake and eat it too. They wanted to worship Baal, but they also, excuse me, YAHWEH, but they also wanted to worship their pagan deities for all of the things that came along with that. In other words, the people were being double minded. And you know from the Book of James, what double mindedness produces in a culture or in an individual for that matter: great weakness and so forth. (James 1:6-8)

Notice when they're confronted, they don't even respond. *"²² Then Elijah said to the people, I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, (Now, yeah, it's not true. Obadiah just told him he was hiding a hundred. But Elijah feels very much alone at this particular point) 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 (YAHWEH) and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." "* (In other words, deal!)

Well, what are you going to say? He just called you on it. What are you going to say? Well, our god doesn't do fire. Yeah, they can't say that. You know why? Baal is known as the, god of the storm. And his big tools in his arsenal are lightning and fire.

Again, again, Elijah is playing right into their belief. He's saying, okay, your god is... First of all, this is his mountain. Right? And isn't your god, the god of the storm who produces fire and lightning? Fine. Great. We're going to take a couple of bulls and we're going to cut them up and put them on the altar. And whoever sends fire. You call upon your god, I'll call on my God. Whoever's god sends fire, he is God.

"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... (Your Bible may say danced. But it's actually the very same word that is earlier in the chapter where Elijah says, "how long will you limp between two opinions?" And it's the same word, it says they limped or danced around the altar.) that they had made.

27 And (about) noon Elijah (started mocking) saying, (come on) "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing (or meditating,) or he is relieving himself, (That's a dig.) or he is on a journey, (Isn't that funny? If you look at the Living Bible, I think it actually says, "maybe he's in the bathroom," But that really kind of tells what he was doing. He was mocking them. He says, maybe he is asleep. Maybe, you got to just be a little bit louder. You got to wake him up.

Verse 28. "And they cried aloud and they 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," (Your Bible may say the time of the evening sacrifice. They have been at it since probably mid-morning. And now it's evening. But it says,) "there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

30 (And) Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." (They are done. They're wiped out. They're just... They are exhausted.) "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," (Beautiful reminder of the covenant relationship.) 32 and with (those)

stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, (That's something they never did.) as great as would contain two seahs of seed." And it would mean roughly it would hold about five gallons 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.

³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, (evening now) 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. "

(And) 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, (or YAHWEH) he is God; the LORD, he is God." ⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain."

Actually, there was no such thing. But Elijah is speaking by faith. Why? Because at the beginning of the chapter, what did God say to him? Go to Ahab. I'm going to bring rain. Now, there wasn't any sign of rain. There wasn't even the sound of rain. But he is speaking out of the voice of faith. He tells Ahab to go do this.

And verse 42 says, "So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top (again) of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." (clear sky.) And he said, "Go again," seven times. ⁴⁴ And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." (That's good

enough, Elijah said) *And he said, "Go up, (and) say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'"*

45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." It's a pretty powerful passage, isn't it?

Can I remind you of something? We look at these guys like Elijah and we go, wow! What a hero! Remember what James said about Elijah? He said this, he said,

James 5:17-18 (ESV)

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, (meaning a sinful nature. He was just a man. And you know what?) he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. (And) Then he prayed again, (very fervently,) and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

James is making that statement to remind you and I, of what he had said right before this passage. Which is, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. But he wants you to remember that the prayers that came forth from men like Elijah were men just like us. They were people. They were human beings, flawed, sinful, struggling.

But the key question of this chapter I would have to say, and perhaps even this study, is, how long are you going to waver between two opinions? I mean, wouldn't you say that's kind of the theme here, at least in this last chapter. It was the challenge that Obadiah faced: Are you going to fear God? Are you going to fear the king more?

It's the question that Elijah put to the nation of Israel: Is it going to be God or is it going to be Baal? How long are you going to go back and forth, and so forth. And I wish I could tell you that this single event spelled the end of Baal worship in Israel. But it didn't.

Nevertheless, it's an important question and it's a question that we need to be careful to keep before ourselves. Because there are other gods - small g - that we can bow down and worship, just as surely as if they were a little statuettes,

or Asherah poles, or altars to Baal. There are things that you and I worship in this life.

And we have to be careful because the Spirit would challenge us with the same question. How long will you waver between two opinions? And we need to be ready to get down on our face and say, The Lord, He is God. But not just for a moment. But to make it a life changing confession and declaration of our lives that if He's God, we're going to worship Him. And if these other things are not God, then we're not going to worship those things.