

# Lessons from the life of Elijah

## 10. The great gathering (1 Kgs. 18:19-22)

Stephen Whitehouse

*Elijah now commences to make preparations for a scene that throughout the history of time has had few equals. God is about to demonstrate on Carmel by signs, wonders and mighty deeds that He alone is the Mighty One. We see in this article how Elijah's gathering of the people together prefigures his greater regathering of Israel, to take place at the time of Christ's return. Having gathered the people, the prophet then challenges them to make up their mind whom they will serve, Baal or Yahweh.*

**E**LIJAH, NOW STANDING in the company of King Ahab, bravely commanded the monarch, "gather [*qabats*] to me all Israel" (1 Kgs. 18:19). The verb *qabats* can also mean 'to collect' or 'to assemble'. Elijah desired the people to be assembled together, in order that they could all "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD", which He would show to them that day (Ex. 14:13).

### Jacob's great Messianic prophecy

The phrase "gather to me all Israel" is similar to that which was employed by Jacob when he spoke to his twelve sons: "Gather [*qabats*] yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days" (Gen. 49:1). Was Elijah attempting to remind the people of this poignant moment in the life of Jacob? In fact, much is learnt when we consider what Jacob spoke about to his sons, for he then uttered the prophetic sentence: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (v. 10).

It should firstly be noted that the Hebrew word for "people" is actually in the plural, *amim*, and relates to the 'peoples of the earth'. The RSV renders this phrase, "to him shall be the obedience of the peoples", and this rendering is also found in Young's Literal Translation and the Septuagint. Thus the blessings that Jacob spoke of relate to a future time, when both national and spiritual Israel will be finally blessed.

But what can be understood by the phrase, "until Shiloh come"? In the original the name 'Shiloh' is derived from a root signifying 'peace', 'rest' or 'tranquillity'. As a proper noun it can signify 'The Bringer of Peace' or 'The Bringer of Tranquillity'. Could there be a more appropriate title for the Lord Jesus Christ, who during his first advent succeeded in the great work of redemption and salvation, and brought about reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18,19), thus giving spiritual peace to his followers?

We now earnestly await our Master's second advent, when he will bring to the faithful everlasting peace and tranquillity, when he is revealed as "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) and Jerusalem will be permanently established in peace (Ps. 122:6; cf. Isa. 62:1,6), a time when "his rest shall be glorious" (11:10).

### "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet"

But how will the prophecy of Jacob be fulfilled? How will this great "gathering of the people[s]" (Gen. 49:10) be accomplished? It is the prophet Malachi who clarifies this: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal. 4:5). The phrase 'the day of the LORD' is often used by the prophets, and refers to a time of national judgement upon Israel (Isa. 2:12; Zeph. 2:2,3; Zech. 14:1).

How will Elijah be sent before a time of judgement on Israel? In a primary sense this prophecy was fulfilled when God sent forth John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk. 1:17), to warn the southern tribe, Judah, of impending national judgement by the Romans in A.D. 70 (Mt. 3:7-12). John was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, being referred to as "[His] messenger" who would come and "prepare the way before [the Lord]" (Mal. 3:1; cf. Isa. 40:3). He warned Judah that the Roman iron "axe" would soon be "laid unto the root of the trees" (Mt. 3:10), fulfilling the prophecy that a nation would come and "put a yoke of iron upon [their] neck", and would be "as swift as the eagle flieth" and "of fierce countenance" (Deut. 28:48-50).

This prophecy concerning the sending of "Elijah the prophet" is to be fulfilled in a secondary sense too. It has been a long-held view that this "day", in a prophetic sense, is not limited to an actual day, but rather extends to an epoch of judgement upon the nations, possibly lasting some forty years.<sup>1</sup> Thus Elijah is to be sent "before", or, as the original word *paniyim* conveys, 'in the presence of' or 'in the face of', a period of Divine judgement upon all nations of the earth. This period will commence with the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), when "Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal", is destroyed upon the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 39:1,4).

But observe that Elijah's work will not begin until after the judgement, when "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). The ancient prophet will thereafter go forth, accompanied with a great company of glorified saints: "And he [the Son of man] shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall *gather* together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mt. 24:31).

The ancient Tishbite will march forth, but not to Judah as did John the Baptist before him, but to those Jews in residence outside the Land. He will command international Jewry to "come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17; cf. Isa. 52:11; Rev. 18:4). So Elijah "shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and *gather* together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11:12). This will be accomplished in order that Israel should be finally "grafted into their own olive tree" (Rom. 11:24).

This is the great work of the Second Exodus, the time when "the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people" (Isa. 11:11). Of this most marvellous event, God has declared: "surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm . . . I will bring you out from the people, and will *gather* you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered . . . I will bring you into the wilderness of the people . . . I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant . . . I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn . . . and ye shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezek. 20:33-38). The pattern of the Exodus under Moses will thus be repeated under Elijah (Mic. 7:15).

During this severe time of chastening, when they "pass under the rod", we learn that nine-tenths will be removed in judgement, and only "a tenth . . . shall return" (Isa. 6:13). The Jewish

faithful will respond to Elijah's call and finally enter into the Land of Promise. Those that come from the north will pass over the River Euphrates, and those that enter in from the south, the Nile (11:11,15; 27:12,13). Thus a national baptism will take place; they will be baptized into the saving Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Christ meant when he said, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11).

It is of great significance that the prophet Malachi declared: "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (4:4). Elijah is here associated with the work of Moses, and how appropriate it was that both were present at the transfiguration of Christ (Lk. 9:28-31)! They were both leaders of an exodus, one past, one to come, and both were educated at Horeb. These great men spoke to Jesus about "his decease", or, in the original Greek, 'his exodus' (v. 31). Unlike the Lord Jesus and Moses, however, Elijah's exodus still awaits him.

#### The contest on the mount

Returning to the record in 1 Kings 18, Elijah desired that the people be "gather[ed] . . . unto mount Carmel" (1 Kgs. 18:19). The people must be brought together to repent and reform. Why did he select Carmel? Firstly, it should be noted that the word 'Carmel' should be in the definitive sense, 'the Carmel'. The word literally means 'the garden', 'the park' or 'the garden-land'. Its name is derived from a root 'to be fruitful'—and rightly so, for it is well famed for its lush vegetation and sea of green foliage, and is referred to as "the excellency of Carmel" (Isa. 35:2). And is it not fitting that Jezreel, meaning 'God sows', lies at the foot of Carmel?

Thus the children of Israel were to be gathered to Carmel so that God could sow His Word into their hearts, in order that they could flourish in the Land of Promise. This, in fact, is the Divine process, the planting of seed into the hearts of His children in order "that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified" (Isa. 61:3; cf. 41:19,20; Jer. 17:8).

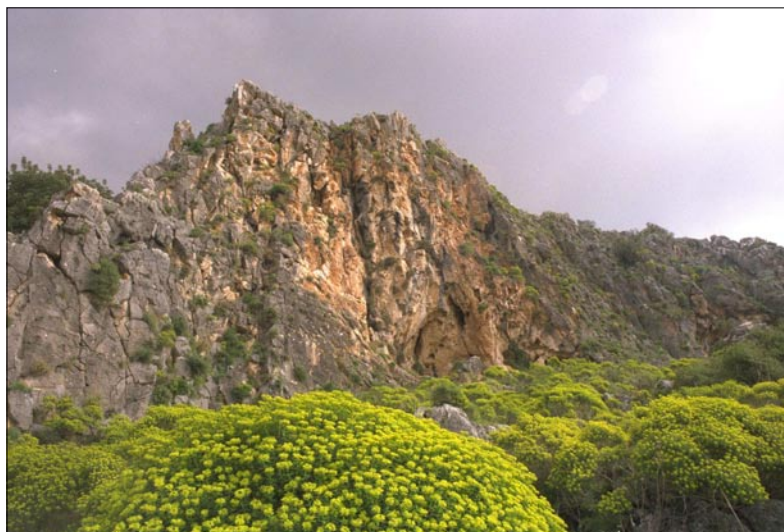
Since Baal was viewed as the god of the sun and of fertility, the people thought that this false

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1. An excellent exposition of this subject can be found in Brother Thomas's booklet *The Mystery of the Covenant of the Holy Land Explained*, and in *Elpis Israel* pages 480-91 (fifteenth edition, 2000).

**A rocky peak in the Carmel Range. Note the lush vegetation.**

Picture: Doron Horovitz/Israel Government Press office



deity was responsible for all the splendour around them on Carmel. However, all the natural beauty should have brought the God of Israel, the Creator, firmly to mind. God had informed them that it was He Who brought the seasons and harvests, for He “giveth rain . . . in his season: He reserveth unto [them] the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jer. 5:24; cf. Job 5:10).

Elijah then continued by commanding that “the prophets of Baal . . . and the prophets of the groves [*asherah*]” (1 Kgs. 18:19) should also be gathered. The Hebrew *asherah* should be rendered ‘idol’ or ‘image’, and is possibly related to the goddess Astarte, a Babylonian-Canaanite goddess of fortune and happiness, a supposed consort of Baal.

The king immediately complied with Elijah’s command (v. 20). But why did Ahab respond so meekly? Surely the answer is that, after the long and drawn out three-and-a-half years’ famine, the degree of suffering must have been so intense and the devastation so acute that the monarch was now prepared to conform to just about any request as long as there was rain.

**“How long halt ye between two opinions?”**

Once all had been gathered, Elijah “came unto all the people” (v. 21). Observe that it was Elijah who took the initiative. He then issued a direct challenge: “How long halt [*pacach*] ye between two opinions?” (v. 21). The Hebrew verb *pacach* can be rendered ‘to pass over’, ‘to spring over’ and ‘to leap’. Notably, the same word is used to describe how the Lord “*pass[ed]* over” the houses, and spared the first-born of those who

had sprinkled “the blood . . . upon the houses” (Ex. 12:13). Was Elijah attempting to remind the children of Israel that the hand of providence had always been active throughout their nation’s life, bringing them out of Egyptian slavery and providing them with true liberty?

Significantly, the word *pacach* can also mean ‘to become lame’. This is exactly what they had become, spiritually lame. They no longer walked in “the way, which leadeth unto life” (Mt. 7:14); in effect they were spiritually dead.

The prophet made no attempt to shield God’s anger, and declared to them that they were of “two opinions”, or ‘thoughts’ or ‘divisions’. He reproved them for mixing the worship of God with that of Baal. They were “lukewarm . . . neither cold nor hot”, and if they were not prepared to change then God would do as Christ said he would do to the Laodicean ecclesia and “spue [them] out of [His] mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

The people may have thought that they could “serve two masters”, but Elijah warned them that they “[could not] serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:24; cf. Josh. 24:19,20). They were worshipping God to satisfy the prophets, but also worshipped Baal to succour favour from Jezebel. As the Apostle James similarly counselled, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (1:8). The lesson is a simple one: we cannot serve God by halves.

Young’s Literal Translation provides an insightful rendering of the words under consideration: “Till when are ye leaping on the two branches?”. Elijah was likening them to an unsettled bird, one that continually hopped from one branch of doctrine to another but never found

rest. The prophet Hosea compared Israel to “a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” but “cried [not] unto [God] with their heart” (7:11,14). The prophet Isaiah similarly testified: “the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (57:20). The children of Israel were now being called upon to determine, once and for all, where their allegiance lay.

### The challenge to the people

Elijah proposed a reasonable challenge to Israel: “if the LORD [Yahweh] be God, follow [*yalak*] Him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kgs. 18:21). The Hebrew word *yalak* can indicate following a manner of life. Their manner and conduct would have to change. Notice that Elijah uses a phrase which is the very meaning of his name, ‘Yahweh is my God’. He was calling them to join and follow him in his worship of the true God of Israel.

What would the people’s response be to such a fair proposal? They “answered him not a word” (v. 21). The effect of this bold suggestion was a hush. They sought refuge in silence, unable to refute Elijah. They were utterly incapable of discerning any flaw or logic in his reasoning.

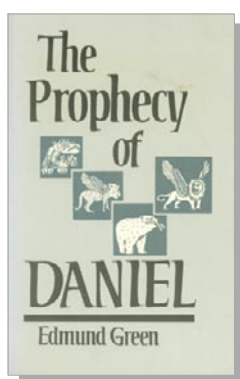
But what was on the mind of the prophet? “I, even I only, remain” (v. 22). He may well have presumed that all the righteous prophets had been slain by the hand of Jezebel (v. 4), that he was the only one who had been preserved. He could have felt that he was a “chosen vessel”, one “to bear [God’s] name before the Gentiles [the widow and her son], and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). But was this simply a false delusion of grandeur?—for we know that God would later declare to the prophet that He had “left Me seven thousand in Israel . . . which have not bowed unto Baal” (1 Kgs. 19:18). What is certain is that, though there were many devout followers of God in the land, they offered little, if any, support to Elijah during this challenge on Carmel.

Let us therefore take great heart from Elijah. Surely, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). It matters not who be against us, for the battle is His. The Truth can never be judged by numbers of supporters. Error has always enjoyed the majority and will continue to hold sway till Christ returns. Let us therefore have faith and confidence in our God, for if we are faithful He will bring us the victory.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

## God rules in the kingdom of men

John Nicholls



*The Prophecy of Daniel.*

Edmund Green, 1988,  
The Christadelphian.

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Brother Green’s book is far easier to read than Brother Thomas’s, since it was written over a century on from the Victorian age when books were longer and arguments developed in more

**D**OING SOME STUDIES recently on Daniel, the reviewer became reacquainted with the late Brother Edmund Green’s book on Daniel. Like most Christadelphians,