

Elijah the Tishbite

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A Great Prophet - A Popular Legacy

"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (James 5:17,18)

The Old Testament prophet, Elijah, is mentioned 28 times in the New Testament. He had a popular legacy during the time of the apostles for at least six reasons: First, he was an ordinary man through whom God accomplished extraordinary things.

As a young man, Elijah embarrassed the petulant King Ahab, angered his wicked wife, Jezebel, rebuked a nation almost totally given over to idolatry, and proved that Baal was no god. Second, they regarded Elijah to be a man of valor because he slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal after he proved they were false prophets. Third, Elijah was the first prophet in Old Testament times to raise a person from the dead. Fourth, God took Elijah to Heaven in a chariot of fire without experiencing death.

Fifth, Peter, James and John saw Elijah on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured. Sixth, the last two verses of the book of Malachi end with the promise of a coming Elijah: **"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."** (Malachi 4:5,6)

Elijah's ministry lasted a mere 24 years, but he is considered to be one of the greatest prophets in Old Testament times. His greatness had nothing to do with his family tree, his education, his personal wealth, or assets. In fact, James emphasizes this point by saying, **"Elijah was a man just like us."** Let there be no mistake – Elijah's greatness stemmed from God's greatness. This is because he dedicated his life in service to God and glorified His holy name, especially at a time when such behavior was politically and religiously incorrect! I have selected Elijah for this month's presentation in *Day Star* because Elijah's life story contains certain experiences that have powerful end time parallels.

How It Started

The twelve tribes of Israel were divided into two nations after Solomon died (around 920 B.C.). The popular and talented Jeroboam became king over ten tribes in the North, and Rehoboam, an insolent son of Solomon, was king over two tribes in the South. Both kings were evil minded in God's eyes and Jeroboam was considered more evil than Rehoboam. Jeroboam led Israel to commit great sins against God, the very One who appointed him to be king over the ten tribes! (1 Kings 11:31) Jeroboam did not trust God's leadership.

His goals were self-serving and he did not want the kingdom united. Jeroboam reasoned that Israel would not remain divided as long as the twelve tribes shared the same religion, so he resorted to a scheme to prevent Rehoboam from reuniting the twelve tribes.

All Jews were required by law to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to observe Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Jeroboam knew that as long as his people regarded the high priest in Jerusalem (who favored the rule of Rehoboam) as their spiritual authority, his control over the ten tribes would not be secure. So, Jeroboam's scheme included displacing the religion of Israel with a "new" religion. Consider these words from the Bible:

"Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to king Rehoboam.

' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.

He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings." (1 Kings 12:26-33)

Amazingly, the people accepted Jeroboam's new religion quickly. It is hard to believe that the Israelites accepted the new changes so readily, but they did. Their behavior demonstrates a profound truth about humankind. People can be led astray very quickly if their religious experience is not based on a personal understanding of God's Word. At the Great Tribulation, the "Jeroboam phenomenon" will occur again when the Antichrist forces everyone to participate in a new one-world religion.

From Bad to Worse

Jeroboam's blasphemy deeply offended God. One day, the old prophet, Ahijah, had a message for Jeroboam and he told Jeroboam's wife, **"Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back. Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in**

Israel – slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone.’ ” (1 Kings 14:7-10)

History records that Jeroboam ruled over the ten tribes for about 20 years before he was killed and his whole family slaughtered. After Jeroboam's reign, a series of evil kings followed who were even more wicked than he was! Like a roller coaster gaining speed as it rolls down an incline, sin and apostasy continued to accelerate in Israel after Jeroboam died. About 35 years after Jeroboam was killed, a selfish and temperamental man named Ahab became king of Israel. His wife was a Sidonian woman, named Jezebel, who was notorious for her glamor and her ambition.

The Bible says, **"There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel."** (1 Kings 21:25,26) This background information on Israel's descent into decadence is important if we are to appreciate the appearing, loyalty, courage and actions of a young man, Elijah the Tishbite, who seemed to come out of nowhere.

Elijah Called

About 870 B.C., northern Israel's decadence had become so evil that God stepped in. He called a "country boy" from the remote desert territory of Gilead to be His spokesman. (God often chooses the most unlikely people to do awesome work.) As a youth, Elijah did not fill his mind with the foolishness of idolatry nor did he chase after the meaningless pleasures of carnal dissipation – pleasures which idolatry not only approved, but exalted.

Elijah was devoted to God; deeply concerned and grieved by the idolatrous behavior of his people. Elijah knew that God's wrath toward Israel's behavior was long overdue. Elijah wanted to make a difference, but he recognized that he was just a youth and powerless to do anything about it. He had no influence, no pulpit and no money. To him, it seemed as if there was nothing he could do – except pray.

Elijah was a good student of God's Word and was intimately acquainted with the writings of Moses. He knew the covenant which the Lord gave to Moses at Mount Sinai was conditional. At Sinai God said, **"If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit."** (Leviticus 26:18-20)

Elijah was also acquainted with Solomon's published prayer which was proclaimed in Jerusalem when the temple was dedicated about 75 years earlier. Solomon had prayed, **"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your**

servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance." (1 Kings 8:35-36)

These and other Old Testament references gave Elijah an idea of how to pray for Israel. James writes, "**Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.**" (James 5:17)

God was touched by the sincere prayer of Elijah. God was very aware of Israel's great wickedness, and in Elijah, God saw a sincere young man who was jealous for His honor. One day, God appeared before Elijah and told him that He had heard Elijah's prayers. Consequently, there would be no more rain until *Elijah* asked for it again. In other words, God gave Elijah the authority to determine when the famine would end! Wow! God placed enormous power in the hands of the young man from Tishbe.

The Lord told Elijah to go and inform Israel's king that God had given Elijah authority over the rain. Think about this for a minute. This is like driving to Washington D.C., presuming that you would get access to the President of the United States, to tell him that it was not going to rain until you said so.

Elijah's faith was so compelling that it allowed him to take God at His word. Without hesitation, Elijah set out for Samaria to find King Ahab. Upon finding the king, Elijah approached him without introduction or savvy court etiquette and made this declaration: "**As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word . . .**" (1 Kings 17:1) That said, Elijah abruptly turned and departed. The king was surprised, then bemused.

No doubt some of the king's attendants laughed out loud at the youthful folly of Elijah. "So here's a young man who thinks he can control the rain! Yeah, right!" Laughing and mocking, they joked, "That kid must have been out in the desert sun too long."

The Bible does not mention how long it took for the reality of the situation to dawn on Ahab. Depending on the season, thirty days without rain is not unusual in Palestine. Sixty days without rain is not deadly, but serious. Ninety days without rain and water shortages become a problem.

It only takes about four months for serious signs of famine to appear. When it became evident that a famine was under way, the Holy Spirit brought a memory to the king and his officials of the sudden appearance and bold declaration of the young man. He seemed to come out of nowhere and disappeared just as fast. Where did this Elijah go? How could *he* control the rain? At first his claim appeared to be absolute folly, for no man could control the rain – or could they? As days continued to pass without a drop of rain, it became apparent that *someone* had caused the rain to cease!

End Time Parallel

There is an important end time parallel here. Revelation predicts that during the Great

Tribulation, there will be no rain for three and a half years (the same length as Elijah's day)! A worldwide famine is coming for the same reasons that a nationwide famine occurred in Elijah's day. Consider this text: **"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."** (Revelation 11:6, KJV)

Many Christians believe the Two Witnesses mentioned in Revelation are Moses and Elijah. My study has led me to a different conclusion. (Review *Day Star* back issues April and May 1997, on our web site.) During the Great Tribulation, the Two Witnesses will empower 144,000 prophets of God to do miraculous things *just like* Moses and Elijah. Like Moses and Elijah, God's servants will exercise awesome supernatural powers *as they see fit*.

Why will God grant so much power to His prophets during the Great Tribulation? I find there are two reasons: First, when incredible miracles can be performed at will, the miracle working person automatically gets a great deal of respect and attention.

Second, when a miracle working person has something to say that is hard to accept, the miracles give added credibility. During the Great Tribulation, God will grant 144,000 prophets miracle working powers so that their antagonistic message will be carefully and thoughtfully considered by people whose minds are dull and darkened by idolatry and sin.

Notice how God used this identical process during the days of Paul and Barnabas, **"So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there [among the pagans in Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders."** (Acts 14:3, insertion mine, italics mine) Why did God give Paul and Barnabas miracle working powers? God gave these powers to Paul and Barnabas in Iconium to confirm the veracity of His messengers among the pagans.

"You Troubler of Israel"

During the third year of famine, Elijah could see that the famine was causing suffering which was overwhelming the whole land. Illness, malnutrition and death had decimated humanity and beasts. All the vegetation was either dead or dormant. Famine had swallowed up the land that once flowed with milk and honey. Elijah's heart was moved by the suffering of thousands of children. Starvation is a slow death and the untimely death of multitudes of sick people who wasted away with protracted suffering stirred Elijah's compassion.

The fact that he had asked for the famine that caused all this suffering and carnage troubled Elijah's conscience! Incredibly, in spite of the famine and the suffering it caused, Israel still did not repent. When *he* could tolerate the decimation of his people no longer, Elijah petitioned the Lord to send rain. James writes, **"Again he [Elijah] prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."** (James 5:18, insertion mine) This is a touching point.

Every now and then, God allows a human being to experience His dilemma. God knows all about pain. When God called Abraham to offer his cherished son, Isaac, on an altar, God

wanted Abraham to feel His own loss when He sacrificed His own dearly beloved Son on the cross. When God granted Elijah the power to control the famine in Israel, He also allowed Elijah to feel what He feels when He is left with no other remedy than to cause extreme suffering in getting humanity's attention. When Elijah had enough, he prayed for rain with the same intensity that he had prayed for famine.

The Bible says, "**After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.' So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab . . .**" (1 Kings 18:1,2) As the famine continued, Elijah had become the most wanted man in Israel, dead or alive. In today's terms, Ahab and his cohorts regarded Elijah as a terrorist. To their way of thinking, Elijah had brought great harm to Israel.

Tens of thousands of people were dead and the survivors were quick to blame Elijah! Ahab wanted Elijah captured and ordered that he be put to death at any cost. When Ahab learned that Elijah wanted to see him, he was surprised! The king went immediately so that he could capture the prophet.

"When he saw Elijah, he said to him, 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?' 'I have not made trouble for Israel,' Elijah replied. 'But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.' " (1 Kings 18:17,18) As the king approached Elijah, Ahab spoke first, blaming him for Israel's misery. Elijah did not blink, neither did he patronize the king. He simply confronted the king with unvarnished truth.

At that moment, the king knew better than to lay hands on Elijah – he could sense that divine power rested upon the young man. More than three years of suffering kept the temperamental king from doing anything rash. Ahab had enough sense to realize that he was talking to a prophet of the Most High God who had control over the rain.

Think about this story for a minute. Who brought trouble upon Israel? Was it Ahab, Elijah or God? Ahab was exceedingly wicked, Elijah was vexed at Israel's apostasy, and God was angry with the degeneracy of the whole nation. In a sense, all three brought trouble upon Israel!

God wanted repentance and reformation, Elijah wanted the God of Abraham to be exalted, and Ahab wanted relief. The point is that God honored Elijah's prayer *because* Israel violated His covenant! This famine did not occur simply because Elijah asked for it, nor was it just an arbitrary act of God. This famine did not occur because God loved Elijah and hated Israel. God does not work that way. Punishment by famine was a clearly stated provision contained in the covenant given at Mt. Sinai.

When God honored Elijah's prayer, God was lawful and timely in doing so. Remember, this issue is also significant during the Great Tribulation. Famine is coming and the famine will be "just" because God is lawful in everything He does!

End Time Parallel

During the Great Tribulation, authorities will regard the 144,000 servants of God as "troublers of the nations." The 144,000 will be found throughout the world, each in his or her own land and tongue. (Presently, the approximate ratio is one of God's servants per 50,000 people.) As servants of God, they will be hated and hunted for the same reasons Elijah was hated and hunted: First, when God's servants exercise their miracle working powers, death and destruction will often follow.

Remember the plagues that Moses called down on Egypt? Remember when Jesus exorcized the demons out of the two men in Matthew 8? (The demons were sent into a herd of pigs, which ran over a cliff and drowned themselves. Therefore, the owners of the pigs blamed Jesus for the great financial loss they suffered.) Remember when Paul and Silas set a young slave girl free from demonic possession and her owners became furious? (Acts 16) In a similar way, the 144,000 will use their miracle working powers as they see fit to overthrow demonic control.

They will demolish foolish arguments and break the strongholds of demons with God's power! The 144,000 will anger people who love evil and people who are exposed by the 144,000 will hate them. People who try to lie to God, will be struck down by the Holy Spirit, just like Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5) God's servants will have awesome powers during their 1,260 days of empowerment. Please do not forget that God's servants will also perform miracles of healing and restoration.

God's servants will receive a lot of respect from those who love truth, but they will be hated by people who love evil. Jesus said, **"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** (John 3:20,21)

The second reason the 144,000 will be regarded as "troublers of the nations" during the Great Tribulation centers around their antagonistic testimony. Because the Great Tribulation begins with several deadly judgments from God (global earthquake, meteoric firestorms, two asteroid impacts, etc.), religious and political leaders in every nation will use their authority of martial law to appease God.

In other words, a time is coming when the religious and political leaders of the world will mandate the worship of God in hopes that He will be appeased and cease His horrific judgments. However, the 144,000 will proclaim God's truth with unvarnished clarity and their opposition to the laws of the land will anger authorities. Like Elijah, God's servants will be regarded as "troublers of the nations" during the end time and the authorities will hunt them down to be jailed or killed.

The Showdown

Back to Elijah's story: When King Ahab approached the young prophet, Elijah did not enter into a conversation with Ahab. There was nothing to discuss. Elijah spoke to the king as though he were a servant. He said, **"Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on**

Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.' So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel." (1 Kings 18:19,20) When the hand of God rests upon a person, smart kings pay attention! In this case, the prophet gave the orders and the king obeyed.

When the appointed day came, thousands of people gathered on Mount Carmel for a showdown between Baal and Jehovah. Consider the scene: There stood the king with his 850 false prophets. Elijah, however, stood alone. For three and a half years the prophets of Baal and Asherah had been unable to produce rain! Now, on the mountain top, would Baal respond to the corporate invocation of his prophets to prove his superiority over Jehovah? From a human interest point of view, the contest must have been very interesting to watch. On one side stood 850 prophets holding up religious icons, smoking censers and wearing imposing priestly regalia.

On the other side stood a country boy from Tishbe wearing the coarse garment of a poor man. **"Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.'** But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, **'I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire – he is God.'** Then all the people said, **'What you say is good.'** Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, **'Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not [deceitfully] light the fire.'**" (1 Kings 18:21-25, insertion mine)

The prophets of Baal could not weasel out of Elijah's offer or the people would have understood the deception and stoned them. **"So they [the prophets of Baal] took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. 'O Baal, answer us!' they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder!' he said. 'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.' So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention."** (1 Kings 18:26-30, insertion mine)

Can you imagine how disgusted the people must have been after watching their 850 prophets spend the whole day dancing and shouting – and after it was all said and done, there was not even a spark!

Have you ever seen a person forced into the admission that his religion was false? False religion is vanity, a figment of fallen imagination. Carnal man needs God, but he prefers a god that condones carnal behavior! False religion appeals to the carnal nature because it offers loopholes to justify sin and wrong doing.

The carnal heart is inherently opposed to God's commandments. (Romans 8) The carnal mind thinks nothing of blaspheming God and usurping His authority. The carnal heart does not hesitate to trash God's wisdom by presumptuously thinking it knows more than God and how things ought to be done. False religion accommodates the carnal heart, making it always popular with the masses.

When Jeroboam installed a foreign religion within Israel, the nation went along with the religion because the majority of the nation's population was carnal in nature. When Elijah put the priests of Baal to the test on Mount Carmel, he knew a showdown would not change the hearts of the vast majority of the people. However, he hoped that by proving Baal to be a false god, some people might repent and humbly submit to God's authority.

Elijah's Turn

"Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come here to me.' They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, 'Your name shall be Israel.'

With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs [about 3.25 gallons] **of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, 'Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.'** 'Do it again,' he said, and they did it again. 'Do it a third time,' he ordered, and they did it the third time. **The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of [the evening] sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'** Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. **When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord [Jehovah]—he is God! The Lord [Jehovah]—he is God!' "** (1 Kings 18:30-39, insertions mine)

Elijah was a man of faith. He not only depended on the Lord's response to his prayer, but his faith also anticipated God's response. The bolt of fire that fell from Heaven proved Baal was a false god in a split second. No words were needed. Even Ahab was speechless. What else could the people say except that "The Lord – He is God." **"Then Elijah commanded them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!' They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there."** (1 Kings 18:40)

The only way to eliminate the influence of false religion is to destroy its preachers. (Of course, the same will be said of God's servants during the Great Tribulation. See John 16.) When the people affirmed that Jehovah was God, Elijah lawfully ordered the execution of the prophets of Baal on the basis of God's authority in Deuteronomy 13.

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you." (Deuteronomy 13:1-5)

Critical End Time Parallel

The fire-from-Heaven display in Elijah's day has a critical end time parallel. In fact, the primary reason for this study on Elijah centers on this fire-from-Heaven parallel. Here is the problem: A time is coming when the devil [the Antichrist] will be allowed to appear on Earth. He will masquerade as God and to prove His assumed divinity, the devil will do many miracles, signs and wonders.

His crowning deception will be his ability to call fire down from Heaven in full view of men! Notice this text: **"And he [the lamb-like beast] performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth [into thinking he was Almighty God.] He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."** (Revelation 13:13,14, insertions and italics mine)

Why is fire-from-Heaven a problem? The problem is that God's servants *will not* be able to respond to this deception! This miracle will trump any miracle which God's servants will be allowed to do. This is God's plan and here is an explanation:

During the Great Tribulation, there will be "a showdown of gods." According to Bible prophecy, the setting for this showdown unfolds like this: A series of devastating judgments from God will cause the Great Tribulation. About 1.5 billion people will be killed by the initial wave of these judgments. At that time, God's 144,000 servants will be empowered to proclaim the gospel (the terms and conditions of salvation).

The 144,000 will testify of the coming kingdom of Christ. The religious and political leaders of each nation will form a crisis government and in an attempt to appease the wrath of Almighty God, they will impose a series of laws upon the inhabitants within each respective nation. These laws will require people to honor and worship God. During this time, the 144,000 will also command the human race to worship God, but the worship required by the laws of men will be contrary to the law of God. This is the setting – a great controversy over worship during the Great Tribulation.

The gospel of Jesus Christ will put the 144,000 servants of God and their followers in a position that will be at odds with the religions and governments of the world. People who accept the gospel presented by the 144,000 will be punished and persecuted for rebelling against the laws of the land.

During the first thirty months of the Great Tribulation, the gospel will go powerfully throughout the world. Most of the world will hear and make a decision about the everlasting gospel. After most of the people have rejected the gospel, the showdown of gods then occurs. It happens this way: God permits the devil [the Antichrist] and his angels to *physically* appear on Earth. Remember, a majority of the world **will have heard and rejected** the truth about the worship which God requires.

Study the words of Paul: "**They** [the majority] **perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.**" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, insertion mine) This verse indicates two things: First, the people of Earth "refused to love the truth." Obviously, you cannot refuse something you have not heard or do not understand.

So, Paul is talking about willful defiance. Second, because people have defiantly rejected truth, God sends a powerful delusion! Why does God send a powerful delusion to the wicked?

God allows the devil to physically appear before the people of Earth because God wants the world to see whom they are actually worshiping if they refuse to worship God. God uses the devil, who masquerades as God, to separate His sheep from the goats. People who love truth and righteousness will worship God.

Those who defy God will be deceived by the fire-from-Heaven miracle, thinking the devil is God! "**Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth . . .**" (Revelation 13:14)

An Angel of Light

When Satan appears on Earth claiming to be God, his radiant countenance will so dazzle the people of Earth that many will believe his claims that he is God based on his appearance alone. Paul says, ". . . **for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.**" (2 Corinthians 11:14) Revelation states that when Satan appears, he will be so dazzling that most people will be awestruck when they actually see him! John writes, ". . . **The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be *astonished* when they see the beast . . .**" (Revelation 17:8, italics mine.)

Satan Works Miracles, Signs and Wonders

Satan's first work after appearing "in the flesh" as a magnificent God-man will be to convince the world that he is divine – that he is actually God. Paul warns, "**Don't let anyone deceive you in**

any way, for that day (the second coming) will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God . . . The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4,9,10)

Calls Fire Down Out of Heaven

The one miracle that Satan will use above all others to convince the wicked that he is God will be to call fire down out of Heaven at will! Because God does not allow His 144,000 servants to call fire down from Heaven, the devil's use of this miracle will make his deception secure for billions of people. John says, "**And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to Earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth . . .**" (Revelation 13:13,14)

Satan will make every effort to deceive the world into believing that He alone is worthy of worship. This is why God grants the devil the power to call fire down from Heaven. If I summarize what God might say, perhaps He would express the problem this way: If men and women refuse to love and obey the clearest evidences of truth and if they refuse to honor me as their Creator and Redeemer, then I will grant them their evil and rebellious desires. I will send them the "father of rebellion." Let them chase after their miracles instead of truth.

Since humanity loves lies more than truth, I will grant Lucifer, the father of lies, the power to perform the ultimate miracle. The wicked will see fire fall from Heaven upon command and they will receive this miracle as "proof of divinity." By doing this, the wicked will worship and receive Satan as their god of choice and seal their eternal fate.

Then the Rain Came

In Elijah's day, the famine proved that Baal could not send water from Heaven. The all-day service on Mount Carmel also proved that Baal could not send fire from Heaven. The verdict was clear, Baal was no god. Baal was merely a figment of foolish imagination. No doubt, some of the older people remembered the words of the covenant that had been spoken at Mount Sinai.

The Lord said, "**If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.**" (Leviticus 26:3-5) Everyone knew that day that Israel's apostasy and Israel's famine were inseparably linked. In the last days, people who love truth will understand this linkage during the

Great Tribulation.

After the evening service was completed, **"Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.' So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. 'Go and look toward the sea,' he told his servant. And he went up and looked. 'There is nothing there,' he said. Seven times Elijah said, 'Go back.' The seventh time the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.' So Elijah said, 'Go and tell Ahab, "Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you." ' Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way [about twenty miles] to Jezreel."**(1 Kings 18:41-46, insertion mine)

Ahab and his entourage must have been astonished to see Elijah outrun their horses all the way to Jezreel! What man can outrun horses for twenty miles?

When Elijah climbed to the top of the mountain to ask for rain, the Lord did not respond to His servant immediately. God tested the faith and endurance of Elijah just like He tested the faith and endurance of Moses when Moses struck the rock. Elijah's faith did not wane. He kept pressing his petition to the Lord to send rain. There is an important parallel for all of us in this story. It is our privilege to press our heartfelt petitions before the Lord and there is good news! God responds. I believe there is a lot of confusion about the purpose and privilege of prayer among Christians. Here are ten short statements to consider:

1. Prayer does not entice God to do things that are not in our best interest.
2. Prayer does not give God permission to do things. God is sovereign.
3. Prayer does not nullify the cause and effect laws that God created because of sin.
4. Prayer does not make God love us more.
5. God will not violate the will of another person because of intercessory prayer.
6. The highest motive for prayer is to be used by God, not to use God.
7. God responds in some way to *every* sincere prayer. Sometimes, it takes a while to figure out how He is responding or how He responded.
8. God closes His ears to our prayers if we defy the convictions of the Holy Spirit.
9. Frequent prayer changes us, not God. Prayer opens our hearts and minds to the greater and wiser will of God. Through prayer God gives us strength to better reflect His character of love when we are tested. Through prayer God gives us courage and peace to trust in His control over matters that are beyond our control. One of the hardest things to believe is that God is intimately involved when everything is going wrong in our life. Prayer can transform doubt into trust.
10. Sometimes, in response to a specific petition, God will dramatically alter the natural outcome of an event to make a statement. (We call these acts of God, "miracles.") But to remain fair to the millions of suffering people who pray for miracles every day, God does not casually alter the rules which He ordained by violating the cause and effect rules. If the cause and effect rules were violated frequently in the universe, there would be unintelligible chaos everywhere! Think about this. If God frequently violated the cause and effect rules, miracles would not be recognized because no one would know if God

had averted a natural consequence or not. Everything favorable would be a miracle and everything unfavorable would also be a miracle, so miracles would not have the amazing effect they have on people today.

I believe the Lord waited to send rain until Elijah prayed seven times in order to humble His servant. God had publicly exalted Elijah, as no other prophet, when He sent fire from Heaven at Elijah's request. Now, God humbled His prophet on the same day by making Him beg for rain. The never-to-be-forgotten point here is that God is not our servant. He is forever God and we never rise higher, even on Mount Carmel, than the position of servant. Elijah was an ordinary man who became great because Elijah's God was great.

Epilog

"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.' Elijah was afraid and ran for his life." (1 Kings 19:1-3)

This study has to close and I could not think of a better stopping place than Elijah running from Jezebel. After running faster than horses for the twenty miles to Jezreel, the prophet probably felt his best defense against Jezebel was running for his life. The contradiction within mankind, even in God's servants, is bravery and boldness for one problem versus weakness and anxiety. May God help us realize that unless we are filled with His presence and strength each day – our flesh is weak, very weak.