

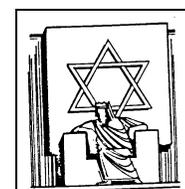
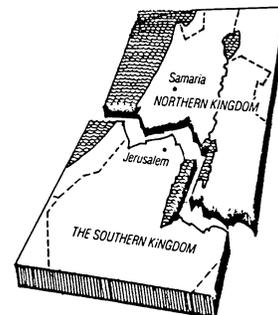
Elijah the Tishbite, Prophet of God

Focus #1: The Historical Setting

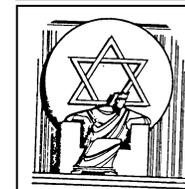
1a. The period during which Elijah ministered – the Divided Monarchy of Israel

Notes:

- [1] The *reason* for the division of the kingdom: after Solomon died, the 10 tribes to the north made his kingdom the grandest the world had ever known. When Rehoboam refused, they rebelled and established their own (rebel) kingdom (2 Kgs 12)
- [2] Pertinent data regarding the *Northern Kingdom*
 - Made up of 10 tribes; known in Scripture as *Israel* or *Samaria*
 - Lasted from 931 (division at death of Solomon) to 722 BC (carried captive by Assyria)
 - First king was Jeroboam, who established a false religion with altars at Dan and Bethel
 - Had a total of 19 kings, from *seven* different dynasties (ruling families), NO good kings
 - Capital first at Shechem, then at Tirzah, finally at *Samaria*
 - Conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 17)
- [3] Pertinent data regarding the *Southern Kingdom*
 - Made up of 2 tribes (Judah/Benjamin); known in Scripture as *Judah*
 - Lasted from 931 (division at death of Solomon) to 586 BC (carried captive by Babylon)
 - A total of 19 kings (and 1 queen), *all of house of David*; **8** good kings
 - Solomon's son, Rehoboam, angered northern tribes, caused split (1 Kings 12)
 - Capital remained at Jerusalem; nation remained (often superficially) loyal to Yahweh
 - Conquered by the Babylonians in 606 -586 BC
- [4] During the period of the Divided Monarchy, much prophetic activity. Prophets from this period who wrote a book in the Old Testament include:
 - to Northern Kingdom: Hosea, Amos, Jonah (also to Assyria)
 - to Southern Kingdom: Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk



THE NORTHERN KINGDOM
 JEROBOAM JEHOAHAZ
 NABATH JEHOASH
 BAASHA JEROBOAM II
 ELAH ZECHARIAH
 ZIMRI SHALLUM
 OMRI MENAHEM
 AHAZ PEKAHIAH
 AHAZIAH PEKAH
 JEHOHAM HOSHEA
 JEHU



THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM
 REHOBOAM JOTHAM
 ABIAH AHAZ
 ASA HEZEKIAH
 JEHOASHAPHAT MANASSEH
 JEHOHAM AMON
 AHAZIAH JOSIAH
 ATHALIAH JEHOAHAZ
 JOASH JEHOIAKIM
 AHAZIAH JEHOIAKIN
 UZZIAH ZEDEKIAH

Note the chart on p 3, as well as the outline of Old Testament history on p 4.

2a. A very important element of the historical record – the reality of the THEOCRACY

The theocracy¹ is well defined as the “form of government under the sole, *accessible Headship* of God Himself,” who was “the Supreme Lawgiver in *civil and religious* affairs . . . and when difficult cases required it . . . the Divine Arbitrator or Judge.” In sum, “the *legislative, executive, and judicial* power was vested in Him, and partially delegated to others

¹G. F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. George E. Day (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889), 199, who credits Josephus with inventing the term “theocracy,” defines it briefly as “the government of God,” and characterizes the concept as “the form of government in the commonwealth founded by Moses.”

to be exercised under a restricted form.”² Gleig emphasizes that in this arrangement, God “assumed not merely a religious, but a political, superiority, over the descendants of Abraham; He constituted Himself, in the strictest sense of the phrase, King of Israel, and the government of Israel became, in consequence, strictly and literally, a Theocracy.”³ Again, Oehler summarizes the relationship: “*In Him, as King, all political powers are united* (their earthly bearers are only Jehovah’s organs); . . . As King, He is the *Lawgiver* and *Judge* of His people, . . . Legal and civil regulations are but an efflux of the divine will. . . . as King, God is also the *leader of His people’s army* (comp. Num. xxiii.21); Israel forms the hosts of Jehovah, Ex. xii. 41 (כל־צבאות יהוה). He goes before them as leader in the combat, Num. x. 35; Israel’s battles are מלחמת יהוה [“the wars of Yahweh”], Num. 21:14.”⁴

That theocratic relationship, formed by Yahweh with Israel, was unique to human history.⁵ Thus, the term should not be taken as descriptive of God’s perpetual rule over all creation; as Oehler insists, “The Old Testament idea of the divine kingship expresses, not God’s general relation of power toward the world (as being its creator and supporter), but the special relation of His government toward His elect people.”⁶ Indeed, there has never been another people who knew God as their King in this immediate and actual sense (Deut 4:7). Peters makes this point carefully: “The simple fact is, that since the overthrow of the Hebrew Theocracy, God has not acted in the capacity of *earthly Ruler*, with a set form of government, *for any nation or people on earth*. . . . the application of the word to any nation or people, or organization since then, *is a perversion and prostitution of its plain meaning*”⁷

Nor should the presence of human mediators of the rule of Yahweh be taken as an indication that the governing arrangement established at Sinai was anything less than a true theocracy. Given the majesty of King Yahweh and the essentially unapproachable character of his holiness, it was essential that he minister his daily rule of the nation through such mediators. As Peters observes, “the institution of such subordinate rulers is *an integral part of a pure Theocracy*, leaving the *Supremacy* untouched and fully acknowledged. The purest Theocracy, adapted to the government of nations, that reason can suggest, must *necessarily*, as a means of honoring the Supreme Ruler and advancing His authority, etc., have its subordinate rulers.”⁸

²George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972), 1:216 [emphasis original]. Cf. J. H. Kurtz, *Manual of Sacred History*, trans. Charles H. Schaeffer (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1855), 113, who states, “Theocracy is a government of the State by the immediate direction of God; Jehovah condescended to reign over Israel in the same direct manner in which an earthly king reigns over his people.”

³G. R. Gleig, *The History of the Bible*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 1:218.

⁴Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 200 [emphasis original]. Cf. Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* (trans. Wm. Whiston) 4.8.41, who speaks of God as the “supreme commander” in Israel’s battles, “ordaining for a lieutenant under him, one that is of the greatest courage.”

⁵The character of the theocracy in Israel is not universally recognized as distinct. For instance, Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, trans. Damian McHugh (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 154, describes that governing arrangement in some detail (which he takes as the tradition preserved by the “Deuteronomist editor”), but then insists that “there is nothing in all this which really sets Israel apart from her neighbors in the Ancient East.” He then surveys various contemporary cultures (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, Babylon) in which the kings represented themselves as serving on behalf of their gods. The issue at this point, however, becomes presuppositional, and as such goes beyond the scope of this study. It will suffice to say that to the degree that one acknowledges the supernatural character of Israel’s religion and of the Old Testament record, he has the capacity to acknowledge the absolute qualitative distinction between the actual theocracy administered by the living God of Israel and the politically motivated and deliberately manipulative claims of pagan monarchs to rule in the name of their gods.

⁶Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 199. The term is sometimes used too broadly, as for any situation in which God rules. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 217, insists that “the word is abundantly perverted; Romanists apply it to their church; Protestants, to the Christian Church; Unbelievers, to priestly rule; writers, to Christian states, . . . thus violating the fundamental and essential idea involved in its meaning.” He then affirms, “The Theocracy is something then *very different* from the Divine Sovereignty, and must not be confounded with the same” [emphasis his].

⁷Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:217, [emphasis original].

⁸Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 1:217 [emphasis original].

The Narrative of the Old Testament on One Page

| Biblical Record | Time Span | An Outline of the Biblical Narrative | Other Scripture Written During this Period | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|---|--------------------------|
| Genesis 1-11 | I. GOD AND _____ [1] | | | | |
| | 1-3 | From Creation (ca 4000 BC) to the call of Abraham (2091 BC) | A. The Creation and Fall of Mankind | | |
| | 4-9 | | B. Destruction by the Flood in the Days of Noah | | |
| | 10-11 | | C. Tower of Babel; the Earth is Populated | | |
| II. GOD & _____ [2] | | | | | |
| Genesis 12 through Nehemiah 13 | A. The _____ of Abraham [3] | | Job | | |
| | Gen 12-36 | 2091 – 1876 BC - to Jacob's descent into Egypt | | 1. Out of Ur to Canaan | |
| | Gen 37-50 | | 2. Down to Egypt | | |
| | B. The _____ of Israel [4] | | | | |
| | 1. Israel under _____ [5] | | | | |
| | Exodus 1 through 2 Kgs 24 | Exodus - Deuteronomy | 1876 – 1406 - to the death of Moses | a. Exodus/Wilderness Wanderings | |
| | | Joshua | 1406 – ca 1350 BC - to death of Joshua's generation | b. The Conquest & Division of the Land of Canaan | |
| | | Judges 1 – 1 Samuel 12 | Ca 1350 BC – 1041 BC -to coronation of King Saul | c. The Period of the Judges | |
| | | d. The Period of the Monarchy | | | |
| | | 1 Samuel 12 Through 2 Kings 24 | 1 Sam 12 – 1 Kgs 11 | 1041 – 971 BC - to death of Solomon | (1) The United Monarchy |
| | | | 1 Kgs 12 – 2 Kgs 17 | 971 – 722 BC -to fall of Northern Kingdom (Israel) | (2) The Divided Monarchy |
| | 2 Kings 18 - 24 | | 722 – 586 BC - to fall of Southern Kingdom (Judah) | (3) The Surviving Monarchy | |
| | 2. Israel under _____ [6] | | | | |
| | Ezra 1 through Neh 13 | No biblical record | 606 – 536 BC - to Cyrus' decree/Jews' return | a. Exile in Babylon for 70 years | |
| | | | | b. Restoration to Jerusalem/Israel | |
| Ezra 1-6 | | 536 – 516 BC - to completion of 2 nd temple | (1) Return under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple | | |
| Ezra 7-12 | | 458 – ca 414 BC | (2) Return under Ezra to reform worship | | |
| Neh 1-13 | | 444 – ca 414 BC | (3) Return under Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem | | |
| | | Daniel, Ezekiel, 1,2 Chronicles | | | |
| | | Haggai, Zechariah | | | |
| | | Esther | | | |
| | | Malachi | | | |

THE DIVINE DRAMA OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN SEVEN SCENES

[GOD & MANKIND]

- I. Universal Dealings
 - A. Creation
 - B. Fall
 - C. Overspreading of the earth with evil; Noahic Flood
 - *Noahic Covenant
 - D. Tower of Babel

Genesis 1-11

[GOD & ISRAEL]

- II. The Patriarchal Age
 - A. Abraham
 - *Abrahamic Covenant
 - B. Isaac
 - C. Jacob
 - D. Joseph

Genesis 12-50

- III. Israel becomes a Nation; The Life of Moses
 - A. The Exodus from Egypt
 - B. The Giving of the Law at Mt Sinai
 - *Mosaic Covenant (aka Sinaitic Covenant, or Old Covenant)
 - C. The Wilderness Wanderings (the unbelieving generation dies)

Exodus – Deuteronomy

- IV. Conquest & Division of the Land of Canaan; the Life of Joshua
 - A. The believing generation enters the land
 - B. 7-year Conquest; the ability of the Canaanites to resist is destroyed
 - C. The Land is divided among the 12 tribes; they are dispatched to complete the Conquest

Joshua 1-24

- V. The Period of the Judges; there is “no King in Israel”

Judges 1 – 1 Samuel 12

- VI. The Monarchy in Israel; Human Kings reign in the Name of the Divine King
 - A. The United Monarchy (12 tribes under one king)
 - *Davidic Covenant
 - B. The Divided Monarchy (2 tribes = Judah; 10 tribes = Israel)
 - C. The Surviving Monarchy (only Judah remains)

1 Samuel 13 – 2 Kings 24

- VII. Exile & Restoration; to Babylon and Back
 - A. Exile in Babylon for 70 years (no biblical record)
 - B. Restoration to Jerusalem/Israel in 3 stages
 - 1. Under Zerubbabel, to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6)
 - 2. Under Ezra, to restore the purity of worship in the temple (Ezra 7-10)
 - 3. Under Nehemiah, to rebuild & re-inhabit the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-13)

Ezra – Nehemiah (with Esther)

The FAMILY of Abraham

The NATION of Israel

Israel under KING YAHWEH

Israel under GENTILE OVERLORDS

2a. The role of prophet in the Old Testament

1b. A definition of the term “prophet”

2b. An important narrative description of the role of the prophet –

3b. The development of the prophetic function in the course of sacred history

1c. The first prophetic *voice* –

2c. The founder of the prophetic *order* –

3c. The founder of the prophetic *office* –

Note:

1) Another term for this specific prophetic office –

2) Consider carefully the connection between this office and the establishment of the monarchy in Israel (1 Sam 8-12)

3) Specifically, what does this reality suggest concerning the taxonomy of authority during the years of the monarchy in Israel?

4b. An important issue: how was a man’s claim to speak for God to be proven true?

1c. The official pattern:

2c. The seminal passage:

3c. Illustrative episodes:

5b. An important development – the “sons of the prophets”

Note: in connection with this phenomenon, the meaning of the word “prophecy” expands a bit, but it never ceases to mean basically what it is established to mean early in the Old Testament.

6b. Some ancillary issues:

1c. The prophets as ecstasies –

2c. New Testament prophets –

3a. Regarding the great crisis of the Divided Monarchy

1b. In brief,

The great crisis of the Divided Monarchy occurred when King Ahab of Israel married a Sidonian princess named Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). Jezebel set out to obliterate the worship of Yahweh in the Northern Kingdom and institute the worship of her patron deity, Baal.

The crisis spread to the Southern Kingdom when Ahab & Jezebel contrived to have their wicked daughter, Athaliah, marry the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (2 Chron 21:6). Athaliah attempted the slaughter of the Davidic line, and only one young boy was saved from her murderous plot (2 Kings 11:1-3).

In order to meet this crisis, Yahweh raised up two mighty prophets: Elijah and Elisha.

Note: an important dynamic in this crisis – the distinction between high-handed violation of the second commandment (Jeroboam's sin) and the high-handed transgression of the first commandment (Jezebel's sin)

2b. The cast of characters

1c. Primary players

- 1) King Ahab of Israel
- 2) Queen Jezebel of Israel (wife of Ahab)
- 3) King Jehoshaphat of Judah
- 4) King Jehoram of Judah (son of Jehoshaphat)
- 5) Queen Athaliah of Judah (daughter of Ahab/Jezebel, wife of Jehoram of Judah)

2c. Secondary players

- 1) King Ahaziah of Israel (son of Ahab/Jezebel)
- 2) King Jehoram of Israel (son of Ahab/Jezebel, successor of Ahaziah – 2 Kgs 1:17)
- 3) King Jehoram of Judah (son of Ahab)
- 4) King Ahaziah of Judah (son of Jehoram & Athaliah, nephew of Ahaziah of Israel, also called Jehoahaz in Scripture)
- 5) King Ben-Hadad of Syria
- 6) King Hazael of Syria
- 7) King Jehu of Israel

3b. Three grand acts in the drama

Act 1: Ahab & Jezebel challenge Yahweh worship in the Northern Kingdom (Israel)

Act 2: Athaliah seeks to destroy Yahweh worship in the Southern Kingdom (Judah); in the effort she attempts to destroy the Davidic seed

Act 3: King Jehu is commissioned by God to destroy the house of Ahab

4b. The narrative of this crisis extends from 1 Kings 16:29 – 2 Kings 11:21

Notes:

- 1) Notice how the brief and hasty narrative slows down dramatically when Ahab is introduced (1 Kgs 16:29), and then resumes that brevity and haste after Athaliah is slain and the rightful Davidic heir, J(eh)oash, is ensconced on the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 11:21).

If 11:21 is the resolution with which the narrative concludes, 10:28 is the climactic dénouement of the drama.

- 2) Elijah does not live throughout this narrative; indeed, he departs the scene rather early in the drama (2 Kgs 2). On the other hand, he remains a central part of the drama even after his physical departure.
 - a) Cf. the three-fold commission given Elijah by Yahweh in 1 Kings 19:15, 16.
 - b) Further, consider the mysterious letter (“writing”) from Elijah to Jehoram (2 Chron 21:12ff.) *after* Elijah’s translation to heaven.
- 3) This grand drama includes a number of episodes which do not immediately involve either Elijah or Elisha. On the other hand, the entire narrative seems framed to demonstrate the ramifications of the wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel, the depth of the crisis produced by that deliberate and malicious assault upon the name and worship of Yahweh in the heart of the covenant community, and the extraordinary measures taken by Yahweh to protect His name in the course of that crisis.
- 4) An assignment: trace the narrative of these chapters as carefully as you can. As you do so –
 - a) Try to chart on paper the relationships between (and among) the various players. Be careful to distinguish those with common (shared) names.
 - b) Have a map close at hand; be careful to identify the various lands and cities central to the drama.
 - c) Some of the episodes in this section seem fairly unrelated to the central drama of the Baal-istic challenge of the worship of Yahweh. Work to discern the connection between those episodes and the broader drama at stake.
 - d) In all of your digging, be sensitive to the reality that these matters were written for our admonition (1 Cor 10:11). Identify legitimate points of personal application along the way.

4a. An overview of the life of Elijah

Scene 1: Conflict with the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 17-19)

17:1 – Elijah the Tishbite emerges suddenly in the narrative, informs wicked King Ahab (Israel) there will be no rain until he (the prophet) speaks it so!

17:2 – 24

Elijah is directed by Yahweh to hide, flees to the brook Cherith (is fed by ravens), and then, when the brook runs dry, is sent to area of Sidon, finds refuge with a widow (miraculous supply of flour and oil), revives her son after the boy's breath was gone from him

18:1 – 46

Elijah finds Ahab (through Obadiah), commands him to assemble the prophets of Asherah and Baal to Mt Carmel (prophets of Asherah do not come), challenges them to trial by fire; Yahweh sends fire, people acknowledge Yahweh, prophets of Baal slain, cloud appears on horizon, Ahab and Elijah hasten to Jezreel to escape the deluge.

19:1 – 21

Jezebel vows Elijah's death, the prophet flees, first to wilderness (angel feeds him), then to Mt Horeb (i.e., Sinai – 40 day trip); Elijah goes in cave (cf. Ex 33:18-23), Yahweh appears to him as an "audible stillness," twice challenges him (:9, 13), gives him 3-fold commission, assures him there are yet 7000 unbowed knees; Elijah first encounters Elisha

Scene 2: The prophetic Guild (Elijah has only occasional roles)

20:1 – 43

Ben-Hadad of Syria (with 32 "kings") attacks Ahab (with 232 young princes) in Samaria; Ahab acquiesces, then resists, a prophet appears (:13) to assure Ahab of victory and direct him in battle (:14, 22); Ahab is victorious; in spring, Ben-Hadad attacks again, a "man of God" assures Ahab of victory (:28); Ahab spares Ben-Hadad, a "certain man of the sons of the prophets" (:35) promises punishment to Ahab, who goes home "sullen and displeased."

21:1 – 28

Ahab lusts after vineyard of Naboth, Jezebel extorts it from Naboth by treachery, Elijah is dispatched by Yahweh to prophecy the bloody and ignominious death of Jezebel and Ahab; when Ahab hears that prophecy, he repents, Yahweh stays full judgment until days of Ahab's son.

22:1- 39

Ahab is anxious to recover Ramoth-Gilead from Syria, solicits help of Jehoshaphat of Judah, they seek out prophetic help from ear-ticklers; finally Micaiah comes, tells of the dispatch of a lying spirit by Yahweh, warns that Ahab will die in the battle; Ahab disguises himself, is struck by random arrow, taken to Jezreel where he dies; dogs lick his blood as Elijah had promised

1 Kings 22:40 – 2 Kings 1:18

Jehoshaphat dies, is replaced by Jehoram; Ahaziah (son of Ahab and Jezebel) reigns in Israel; Ahaziah falls and injures himself, sends for Elijah (3 groups of 50); finally Elijah journeys to Samaria, tells Ahaziah he will die; Ahaziah dies

Scene 3: Elijah passes his mantle to Elisha

2:1 – 17

Elijah and Elisha travel from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho – Elisha refuses to go back (even when sons of the prophets tell Elisha that Elijah is about to be taken up); the two prophets cross the Jordan miraculously, Elisha requests the double portion; Elijah is taken up, drops mantle to Elisha; Elisha re-crosses the Jordan miraculously (mantle); sons of the prophets look for Elijah in vain.

Sequels -

Focus #2: The Ministry of Elijah

Introduction: Although the grander drama being considered – the story of the assault upon the worship of Yahweh in the land of Israel – extends from 1 Kings 16 through 2 Kings 12, the life of Elijah himself is chronicled in 1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 2. We will consider that section of Scripture under four heads:

- I. SCENES OF CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT (1 Kgs 17:1-19:10)
In three distinguishable narratives, Elijah confronts King Ahab of Israel (17), the prophets of Baal (18), and Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab (19:1-10)
- II. SCENES OF CONFIRMATION AND COMMISSIONING (1 Kgs 19:11-21)
In a remarkable moment of interaction with Yahweh – a moment deliberately reminiscent of one experienced over 400 years by Moses – Elijah is refreshed and given a three-fold commission, and then Elijah fulfills the first element of that commission by appointing Elisha his successor.
- III. SCENES OF COMBAT AND CONDEMNATION (1 Kgs 20:1 – 2 Kgs 1:18)
In four narratives of battles, treachery and desperation, often involving prophetic voices other than that of Elijah, the point is powerfully made that the ultimate authority in Israel is not the human king (whoever he be) but the divine King, whose name is Yahweh.
- IV. SCENES OF COMMITMENT AND CELEBRATION (2 Kgs 2:1-17)
As the time draws near for Elijah to be promoted to glory, Elisha demonstrates his commitment to the cause of protecting Yahweh's name; the mantle of Elijah is committed to Elisha as the elder prophet is taken.

I. SCENES OF CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT (1 Kgs 17:1-19:10)

A. Elijah's bold proclamation – there will be no rain until he calls for rain! (17:1-24)

1. Elijah issues the proclamation to King Ahab (17:1)

Note:

- 1a Notice that Elijah first bursts upon the scene in this scene of confrontation with Ahab. Virtually nothing is known of his birth or life or call to the prophetic ministry; we have only these accounts. The title "Tishbite" evidently refers to his home town (probably Tishbi in upper Galilee, in the allotment of Naphtali), but even that is much debated. He had evidently migrated to Gilead (east of Jordan) where he was dwelling ("of the dwellers in Gilead" – 17:1). His name is significant (*My God – Yahweh*), especially given the drama to unfold around him. The way he clothed himself (2 Kgs 1:8 – best read "a man clothed in a hairy garment with a simple leather belt around his waist") seems to have become the typical garb of one who would identify himself as a prophet of Yahweh (Zech 13:4; cf. Mt 11:8).
- 2a Concerning the man, Ahab
 - 1b Notice the prophetic summary of Ahab's life and character in 16:29-33, and again in 21:25-26.
 - 2b Notice as well other Scriptural indications of the unique wickedness of Ahab and his house:
 - 1c 1 Kings 16:34 – the reference to the rebuilding of the long-cursed city of Jericho is intended as a commentary on the spiritual condition of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Ahab (cf. the curse issued by Joshua in the days of the Conquest, Josh 6:26).
 - 2c Micah 6:16 – as the Northern Kingdom falls, Micah traces God's anger to the "statutes of Omri" and "all the works of Ahab's house."

2. Elijah hides himself from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (17:2-24)

a. To the brook Cherith (17:2-7)

First, Elijah is sent to the brook Cherith (east of Jordan), where he is provided for by ravens bringing him food.

Note: This passage is difficult for Jewish expositors as the raven is an unclean bird. Thus the Hebrew divines have tried to spiritualize the reference, seeing it as speaking of “Arabs” or “merchants.” However, Elijah was not to eat the ravens!

b. To the city of Zarephath (17:8-24)

When the brook dried up, Yahweh directed Elijah to a village near Sidon (in Phoenicia) where He had provided a widow to care for the prophet

Note:

1a It is not without significance that the village is in the territory ruled by the family of Jezebel.

2a God directs Elijah to hide himself in order to avoid the attempts of Ahab to force him to relent (cf. Ahab’s effort to find Elijah reflected in 18:10)

3a Notice the way in which the widow responds to Elijah when the prophet asks for a morsel of bread – “As Yahweh, your God, lives...” (:12). This is suggestive as to the understanding of the reason for this famine even beyond the borders of Israel, and it is suggestive of the spiritual state of this Gentile widow, living in a land entirely dominated by the family of Jezebel.

4a Notice the very deliberate (and difficult) test which Elijah laid before the widow: “Make me a small cake *first* and bring it to me, and afterward make some for yourself and your son” (:13).

5a When the widow’s one son fell deathly sick, she brought the boy to Elijah and confronted him regarding his motives in coming to her. A question: Was the boy dead?

Note the widow’s statement in 17:18 – “What have I to do with you? [lit: “what between me and thee?”]. Compare Jud 11:12; 2 Sam 16:20; 2 Kgs 3:13; Mt 8:29; Jn 2:4.

Again, Elijah simply called out to God for the boy to be revived, and his prayer was answered.

6a Note carefully the response of the widow in 17:24.

B. Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal (18:1-46)

1. The prophet confronts King Ahab after 3½ years (1-19)

Note:

1a The NT is explicit that the drought endured for 3½ years (Luke 4:25; Jms 5:17). The reference to “the third year” in 18:1 must be to Elijah’s stay in Zarephath (as opposed to the idea that the drought had already begun before Elijah’s proclamation).

2a Notice the heroism of Obadiah, a believing courtier of King Ahab (18:3-4), as well as the (reasonable) fear of Obadiah that if he were to go fetch Ahab the Spirit would whisk Elijah off to another place (18:2-16).

2. The contest on Mt Carmel between Yahweh and the prophets of Baal (18:20-40)

Note:

1a The prophets of Baal are part of the officially endorsed and publically financed religious apparatus of Ahab and Jezebel (18:19). Thus it is that King Ahab is able to authoritatively summon those prophets to Mt Carmel.

A question: why did the prophets of Asherah (18:19) not attend?

2a Baal was the chief deity of Asia, worshipped primarily as the sun-god (though there is much discussion regarding this); he was closely associated with Asherah (his female counterpart) and Molech (cf Jer 19:5; 32:35).

3a Compare other times when God flashed forth fire – Lev 9:24; 1 Chron 21:26; 2 Chron 7:1

4a The slaughter of the priests of Baal is precisely what the Law demanded (Deut 17:2-6); there could hardly be any doubt as to whether these were guilty of worshipping false gods.

3. Elijah prays for rain and the drought is ended (18:41-46)

Note:

1a Elijah perseveres in prayer; seven times he sends his servant to look for rain (:43)

2a Question: Why did Elijah run with such Spirit-empowered haste to return to Jezreel (18:46)?

C. Elijah flees from the wrath of Jezebel (19:1-10)

Note:

1a The role of Jezebel in this entire drama is clear in Scripture (1 Kgs 16:31; 21:25; Rev 2:20); she was the instigator, while Ahab was the facilitator.

2a Elijah flees first of all to Beersheba (where he left his servant), and then to the wilderness (19:4, probably on the western shore of the Dead Sea), where he confessed his despondency over the intransigence of the nation of Israel.

3a The prophet is then fed by an angel (cf Mt 4:11), after which he makes his way to Mt Horeb (19:8, aka Mt Sinai). Notice that the trip (which should have taken about 10 days) took 40 days & nights.

4a. There at Mt Horeb (Sinai) Elijah is asked (for the first of two times in rapid succession), “What are you doing here?” His answer seems a mixture of frustration and despair (19:10).

II. SCENES OF CONFIRMATION AND COMMISSIONING (1 Kgs 19:11-21)

In a remarkable moment of interaction with Yahweh – a moment deliberately reminiscent of one experienced over 400 years by Moses – Elijah is refreshed and given a three-fold commission, and then Elijah fulfills the first element of that commission by appointing Elisha his successor.

A. Confirmation of Elijah – Yahweh encourages the despondent prophet (19:11-14)

Note:

1a The parallel between this scene and that recorded in the life of Moses (Ex 33:12- 34:9) is deliberate and instructive.

2a How are we to understand the reference to the “still small voice” with which God finally spoke to Elijah (19:12)?

Note: a literal translation: “the sound of soft silencing,” or “an audible gentle stilling.”

3a Notice that there are two times when Yahweh demands of Elijah, “Why are you here?” (19:9, 13); in each case the prophet’s answer is identical (:10, 14). The way Yahweh responds to the second of those two (19:15-18) would suggest that the Lord recognized that the prophet was exhausted and had made provision for the work to be finished by those who would go in “the spirit and power” of Elijah.

B. A commissioning of Elijah (19:15-18)

Note:

1a The 3-fold commission

1. Anoint Hazael as king over Syria (in the stead of Ben-Hadad) – 19:15

Notice that it is Elisha who does this (2 Kgs 8:8-15)

2. Anoint Jehu as king over Israel (to destroy the house of Ahab) – 19:16

Notice that it is Elisha who does this as well (2 Kgs 9:1-3, 6-14)

3. Anoint Elisha in your place – 19:16

2a Yahweh concludes this commissioning service with an ominous promise concerning the destruction the fate of the wicked house of Ahab (19:17), and then with an encouraging promise concerning the remnant of the faithful in Israel (19:18).

3a. Question: what does this commission suggest regarding those who are not Elijah, but who go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah and accomplish the work of (begun by) Elijah?

C. A commissioning of Elisha (19:19-21)

I. Scenes of Confrontation and Conflict (1 Kgs 17:1-19:10)

II. Scenes of Confirmation and Commissioning (1 Kgs 19:11-21)

III. SCENES OF COMBAT AND CONDEMNATION (1 Kgs 20:1 – 2 Kgs 1:18)

In four narratives of battles, treachery and desperation, often involving prophetic voices other than that of Elijah, the point is powerfully made that the ultimate authority in Israel is not the human king (whoever he be) but the divine King, whose name is Yahweh. This section is clearly part of the larger narrative of how Yahweh intervened to rescue His name in the face of the crisis precipitated by Jezebel (in Israel) and Athaliah (in Judah), but it is not readily apparent how each of these accounts speaks to that broader narrative. I would suggest that the element common to all four narratives provides the best hint as to how these stories contribute to that drama. In each case, a king is either defiant or helpless, and Yahweh intervenes (in the person of some prophetic individual) in such a way as to demonstrate that the real King is Yahweh.

A. A Struggle between Syria (King Ben-Hadad) and Israel (King Ahab) [20:1 – 43]

Summary: Ben-Hadad of Syria (with 32 “kings”) attacks Ahab (with 232 young princes) in Samaria; Ahab acquiesces, then resists, a prophet appears (:13) to assure Ahab of victory and direct him in battle (:14, 22); Ahab is victorious; in spring, Ben-Hadad attacks again, a “man of God” assures Ahab of victory (:28); Ahab spares Ben-Hadad, a “certain man of the sons of the prophets” (:35) promises punishment to Ahab, who goes home “sullen and displeased.”

The Issue: the helplessness and defiance of King Ahab

1. The challenge by King Ben-Hadad of Syria (20:1-12)

Notes

1a Some important background considerations

1b The issue for Ben-Hadad: Ahab had formed some very important political alliances (married a Sidonian prince, securing his border on the northwest; married his daughter to a prince in Judah, securing his border on the south). Given that security, he could concentrate on fortifying himself against Syria on the northeast. Thus it was expedient that Ben-Hadad establish his authority over Ahab while he had the chance.

2b Notice that Syria had a force of 32 kings. This was doubtless a very loose, self-serving coalition he had mustered in the attempt to subdue Ahab; the motive for their involvement was primarily (if not exclusively) that they might participate in the anticipated spoil. The point is that though there was a great number gathered with Ben-Hadad, they were a very ineffectual fighting force (as the narrative demonstrates).

3b The initial acquiescence by Ahab indicates that he was ill prepared to resist (:2-4)

When Ben-Hadad decides to “go for it all,” Ahab determines to resist (:5-11); in response, Ben-Hadad orders an attack (:12). Again, Ahab has every reason to believe he is outmanned and helpless.

2. The initial battle: Ahab is victorious with prophetic help (20:13-21)

Note the intervention of an unnamed prophet (:13-14), first promising that God would give the enemy into his hand, and then carefully directing Ahab in the battle.

3. The second battle: again Ahab is victorious with prophetic help (20:22-30)

Note:

1a. Note that the prophet warned Ahab that Ben-Hadad would return in the spring (when kings go out to war), and again gave careful instruction as to how Ahab was to prepare.



- 2a. Note carefully the explanation offered by the servants of the king of Syria as to why Israel had been victorious over them. This illustrates a basic (ontological) distinction b/w the pagan attitude toward their gods (they are to be manipulated) and the biblical attitude demanded of Israel by Yahweh (He is to be obeyed).
- 3a. The Syrians take careful steps to prepare more thoroughly for this second battle. (Especially curious: 20:24, 25.) Notice their numeric advantage over Israel as described in :27.
- 4a. Regarding the defeat of the Syrians, and specifically the wall that fell and killed 27,000 of them (:29, 30) –
- 4. The ill-conceived treaty made by Ahab with Ben-Hadad (20:31-43)
 - Note:
 - 1a Notice the obsequious attitude of Ben-Hadad as he dispatches emissaries to Ahab (:31-32)
 - 2a The sin of Ahab in this – Lev 27:29
 - 3a Notice the spirit of Ahab after the rebuke by the “son of the prophets” - :43

B. A Struggle between King Ahab and the Law of Moses [21:1 – 28]

Summary Ahab lusts after vineyard of Naboth, Jezebel extorts it from Naboth by treachery, Elijah is dispatched by Yahweh to prophecy the bloody and ignominious death of Jezebel and Ahab; when Ahab hears that prophecy, he repents, Yahweh stays full judgment until days of Ahab’s son.

The issue: The defiance of King Ahab

1. The theft of Naboth’s vineyard (21:1-16)

Note

- 1a The reason Naboth could not sell the vineyard – Lev 25:23; Num 36:7; Eze 46:18
- 2a Notice Ahab’s spirit in 21:4 – “sullen and displeased.” The two uses of this phrase seems designed to tie the two narratives together, to help the reader understand that the real issue was the king’s defiance of God.
- 3a Again, the greatest treachery is that of Jezebel; Ahab is an almost passive participant. (That does nothing to reduce the culpability of Ahab, but it is an important element of this story.)

2. Ahab is confronted by Elijah (21:17-29)

Note:

- 1a Notice the specific and chilling prophecy of doom in 21:19 & 23-24. Recall that the vineyard coveted and stolen by Ahab is immediately outside his summer palace in Jezreel (on the slopes of Mt Gilboa, above the Valley of Jezreel)
- 2a Notice the repentance of Ahab – late and self-serving, but sufficient to capture the attention of Yahweh and to move him to delay the full imposing of the judgment (:27-29)

C. A Struggle between Syria (King Ben-Hadad) and Ahab & Jehoshaphat
(Kings of Israel & Judah, associated by the marriage of their children to one another) [22:1- 40]

Summary: Ahab is anxious to recover Ramoth-Gilead from Syria, solicits help of Jehoshaphat of Judah, they seek out prophetic help from ear-ticklers; finally Micaiah comes, tells of the dispatch of a lying spirit by Yahweh, warns that Ahab will die in the battle; Ahab disguises himself, is struck by random arrow, taken to Jezreel where he dies; dogs lick his blood as Elijah had promised

The issue: the defiance of King Ahab

1. The battle takes shape (22:1-4)

Note that in this instance Ahab has determined to re-take a city which Ben-Hadad had seized, and he solicited the help of Jehoshaphat (of Judah) in the effort.

2. The word of the prophet concerning the battle (22:5-28)

Note:

1a Notice that Ahab has a full chorus of false prophets anxious to tickle his ear. Indeed, given Jehoshaphat's request (:5), it seems these false prophets would insist they could speak for Yahweh.

2a A very interesting element of this account: Micaiah's revelation of the lying spirit who appeared before the divine Throne of Yahweh and volunteered to deceive Ahab (:19-23)

3a Important: in this narrative the confrontation is not only between Ahab and Yahweh, but between the guild of false prophets and the true prophet of Yahweh.

3. The battle ensues; Ahab is slain and Elijah's prophecy is fulfilled (22:29-40)

Note'

1a A curious question: why Jehoshaphat agreed to the arrangement suggested by Ahab (:30)

2a The reasoning behind the battle orders given by Ben-Hadad (:31) – the intent was to claim the realm of Ahab, and thus the most basic demand was the death of Ahab. On the other hand, because Ahab was felled by a random arrow and escaped to Jezreel to die, the Syrians evidently were unable to complete that plan. At any rate, after Ahab's death his son Ahaziah is proclaimed king in Samaria (:51)

3a Notice the very careful description of how it was that Elijah's prophecy (21:23, 24) was fulfilled (:37, 38).

D. A Struggle between Ahaziah (king of Israel, son of Ahab/Jezebel) and Elijah [1 Kings 22:40 – 2 Kings 1:18]

Summary: Jehoshaphat dies, is replaced by Jehoram; Ahaziah (son of Ahab and Jezebel) reigns in Israel; Ahaziah falls and injures himself, sends for Elijah (3 groups of 50); finally Elijah journeys to Samaria, tells Ahaziah he will die; Ahaziah dies.

The issue: the defiance of King Ahaziah

1. The prophetic narrative (characterization) of the reign of Jehoshaphat of (1 Kgs 22:40-50)

Note:

1a The reign of Jehoshaphat is introduced here in very typical fashion; on the other hand, Jehoshaphat will play a significant role in the narrative of 2 Kgs 3, an account in which Jehoshaphat allies himself to Ahab's son, Jehoram, in a later battle against Moab.

2a Jehoshaphat is consistently characterized as a "good" king (22:43; cf 2 Chr 17:3), except that he allied himself with Ahab by marriage (22:44; cf. 2 Chr 19:2).

3a The record makes reference to several interesting elements of the reign of Jehoshaphat –

1) He made war (cf. 2 Chron 20)

2) He enacted important religious reforms, including expunging the "perverted persons" (probably temple prostitutes, male and female, left over from the days of Rehoboam, 1 Kgs 14:24 (cf 2 Chr 19)

3) There was little political leadership in Edom, to the south, which made possible...

4) Jehoshaphat attempted to build a fleet of sailing ships at Ezion-Geber (to the south, on the Gulf of Aqaba, an extension of the Red Sea, where Solomon had a navy of sorts, 1 Kgs 9:26), but they were destroyed (cf 2 Chr 20:36)

2. The prophetic narrative of King Ahaziah of Israel, son of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 22:51 – 2 Kgs 1:18)

Notes

1a The apparent chronological discrepancy b/w 1 Kgs 22:51 and 2 Kgs 3:1 (2 yr reign of Ahaziah, but Ahaziah began in 17th yr of Jehoshaphat and his successor, Jehoram, began in 18th yr) is resolved by the understanding that any part of the first year of the king's reign = a year; Ahaziah reigned 1 whole year, part of another year.

2a Notice that Ahaziah reverted to the full-throated worship of Baal (as reflected in his appeal to Baal-Zebub in 2 Kgs 1:2), in spite of the fact that his father, Ahab, had abandoned Baal in favor of the worship of Yahweh after the fashion of Jeroboam. The appeal to Baal-Zebub should be understood as an official declaration of that commitment; thus the attempt to be rid of Elijah (cf 1:15), and thus the stern judgment by Yahweh (1:16-17)

3a This account is introduced with the note that Moab had rebelled against Israel (cf 2 Sam 8:2 for the record of David's subjugation of Moab); the suggestion is that Ahaziah was too weak to prevent this, perhaps regarded the conflict with Yahweh and his prophet as responsible for that weakness, and was therefore anxious to be rid of Elijah. In that regard, the initial embassy which encountered Elijah probably knew he was but were reluctant to let King Ahaziah know that they knew; the strong implication of the account (esp :15) is that Ahaziah was intent on killing Elijah and thus would have been angry with those messengers for not seizing the prophet when they had the opportunity.

4a "Captain of 50" is a military designation – cf 1 Sam 8:12

5a The fire falling from heaven is especially significant, given Elijah's recent history (1 Kgs 18).

6a Why would the king send another squadron of soldiers (1:11), and why would that 2nd squadron consent to go. Again, the mentality of a polytheist is that with the right manipulation and/or caution, a god who proves himself powerful in one situation might be vulnerable at another time. Notice that the second "captain" intensifies the demand: "Come down *quickly!*" (i.e., RIGHT NOW!).

7a Two times Elijah represents the challenge of Ahaziah as suggesting that "there is no God in Israel" – that is, that Israel's covenanted God is not to be feared. That was exactly the challenge which Ahaziah meant to make.

- I. Scenes of Confrontation and Conflict (1 Kgs 17:1-19:10)
- II. Scenes of Confirmation and Commissioning (1 Kgs 19:11-21)
- III. Scenes of Combat and Condemnation (1 Kgs 20:1 – 2 Kgs 1:18)
- IV. SCENES OF COMMITMENT AND CELEBRATION (2 Kgs 2:1-18)

As the time draws near for Elijah to be promoted to glory, Elisha demonstrates his commitment to the cause of protecting Yahweh's name; the mantle of Elijah is committed to Elisha as the elder prophet is taken.

A. Elijah and Elisha make their way across the Jordan (2:1-8)

Notes

- 1a The text is quite clear that the imminent departure of Elijah was commonly known (2:3, 5, 9), though it does not make clear how that was known.

A suggestion:

- 2a Elijah & Elisha travel from Gilgal (probably near the Jezreel Valley, as opposed to the place in the Jordan Rift) to Bethel (in the hills of Ephraim). In each place Elijah implored Elisha to stay behind (cf Ruth 1:8, 11, 12; Jn 21:15-17), and each time Elisha refused. Notice that there was a community of the "sons of the prophets" in each place (:3, 5), and they too warned Elisha of what was about to happen.
- 3a There is much significance in the way Elijah & Elisha cross the Jordan River (2:8; cf Ex 14:16; Josh 4:23).

B. Elijah is caught away to heaven; Elisha receives the mantle of the departing prophet (2:9-14)

Notes

- 1a The request of Elisha to receive the "double portion" should be understood in the light of the culture of that day. The double portion was given to the son who had been chosen to succeed the father in leadership of the family/clan (cf Deut 21:17). In other words, Elisha was volunteering to step into the role of Elijah (a willingness which is the more dramatic given the final scene of Elijah's life – 2 Kgs 1). Elijah clearly comprehended that this was Elisha's intent, and it was because the aged prophet knew well what a heavy and difficult task it was that he implored young Elisha again and again to abandon the task – all of which was more of a test than it was a command (which is evidenced by the fact that when Elisha refused to stay behind, Elijah acquiesced).

- 2a Elijah insisted to Elisha, "if you see me taken from you, it shall be so..." (2:10).

Notice 2:11, 12 – "a chariot of fire with horses of fire...separated the two of them...Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, AND ELISHA SAW IT..."

A suggestion: the chariots of fire (an apt reference to a theophany, Ps 104:3,4; Isa 66:15; Hab 3:8) were not visible to the mortal eye (cf 2 Kgs 6:14-17). Thus, the condition was met (:10, "if you see me when I am taken") and Elisha could be confident that he had been chosen to succeed Elijah in the work at hand. This is why the sons of the prophets were so incredulous and insisted on searching for Elijah (2:16-18).

- 3a Elisha's capacity to part the waters of the Jordan on his return (2:13,14) was demonstration to the sons of the prophets that "the spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha" (2:15).

C. The Sons of the Prophets are convinced (2:16-18)

Notice that in the succeeding narrative Elisha begins immediately to work miracles (a la Elijah). Indeed, the next chapters are given to episodes in which Elisha intervenes in the affairs of state again and again, employing miracles and issuing predictive prophecies, fully functioning in the role Elijah had played at the beginning of this crisis. All of that leads to the time when Elisha anoints Hazael king of Syria (8:7-15), and then anoints Jehu king in Israel (9:6) and commissions him to destroy the house of Ahab (9:7-10). In this Elisha fulfilled the commission given to Elijah by Yahweh in 1 Kgs 19:15,16.

Appendix: The Grand Narrative

I. The Setting (1 Kgs 16:29-34 [esp :31-33])

II. The Divine Response (1 Kgs 17 – 2 Kgs 11)

A. The seminal narrative: Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1 – 2 Kgs 2:18)

1. SCENES OF CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT (1 Kgs 17:1-19:10)
In three distinguishable narratives, Elijah confronts King Ahab of Israel (17), the prophets of Baal (18), and Queen Jezebel, wife of Ahab (19:1-10)
2. SCENES OF CONFIRMATION AND COMMISSIONING (1 Kgs 19:11-21)
Elijah is refreshed and given a three-fold commission, and then Elijah fulfills the first element of that commission by appointing Elisha his successor.
3. SCENES OF COMBAT AND CONDEMNATION (1 Kgs 20:1 – 2 Kgs 1:18)
In four narratives of battles, treachery and desperation, often involving prophetic voices other than that of Elijah, the point is powerfully made that the ultimate authority in Israel is not the human king (whoever he be) but the divine King, whose name is Yahweh.
4. SCENES OF COMMITMENT AND CELEBRATION (2 Kgs 2:1-17)
As the time draws near for Elijah to be promoted to glory, Elisha demonstrates his commitment to the cause of protecting Yahweh's name; the mantle of Elijah is committed to Elisha.

B. The concluding narrative: Elisha (2 Kg 2:19 - 10:36)

1. Elisha purifies a spring (2:19-22)
2. Elisha curses insolent young men (2:23-25)
3. Elisha directs Jehoshaphat and Jehoram in battle with Moab (3:1-27)
4. Elisha provides oil for a wife of one of the sons of the prophets (4:1-7)
5. Elisha restores the son of a Shunamite who had cared for him (4:8-37)
6. Elisha purifies a pot of rancid stew for the sons of the prophets at Gilgal (4:38-41)
7. Elisha miraculously feeds 100 men (4:42-44)
8. Elisha instructs a Syrian leper (Naaman) how to be healed, punishes Gehazi for his greed (5:1-27)
9. Elisha recovers an axe head (6:1-7)
10. Elisha delivers Samaria from an invasion by Ben-Hadad of Syria (6:8-7:20)
11. Elisha restores the land of the Shunamite (8:1-6)
12. Elisha anoints Hazael king of Syria in place of Ben-Hadad (8:7-15)

ROYAL NARRATIVES:

Jehoram of Judah (8:16-24)

Ahaziah (son of Athaliah) of Judah (8:25-27)

Jehu of Israel (8:28 – 10:36)

Notice 10:28!

C. Postlude: the reign of Athaliah in Judah (11:1-21)

Notice 11:21!