

King Ahab of Israel, Part 2

Bible Characters

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Bible Text: 1 Kings 18:1-19; 1 Kings 21:1-8
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Our scripture lesson today is taken from 1 Kings, chapter 18, beginning on page 556.

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.” 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, 3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. 4 While Jezebel was killing off the LORD’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) 5 Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals.” 6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. 7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?” 8 “Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’” 9 “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? 10 As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. 11 But now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ 12 I don’t know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have

worshiped the LORD since my youth. 13 Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. 14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!" 15 Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today." (1Kings 18:1-15)

The word of the Lord. ["Praise be to God."]

May we pray.

Lord, help me to extract from this fascinating passage of scripture, truth for today, that may give us bright hope for tomorrow. And we ask these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

AHAB, WHAT'S IN A NAME

Now, it's interesting as we read this passage of scripture, that Elijah did indeed show himself alive to Ahab that very day. And so you read on there in verse 16:

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 "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. 19 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." (1 Kings 18:16-19)

Now I want you to think about this with me for a moment. First of all, Ahab's name is really odd, and it reminded me of that passage in First Corinthians where St. Paul says to the Corinthian church, why haven't you mourned? You tolerate things in your church that not even the Gentiles tolerate. A man has his father's wife.

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Now, that doesn't mean it's his blood mother. It means that the woman had been married to his father, and this man is living in fornication with her in the church at Corinth.

Remember this, that strange things happen in the pagan world.

Ahab's name (אַחָאָב) means, "My brother my father" ('ah + 'ab, אָחָאָב, (Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner (1958), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill), Vol. I, p. 29). My brother is my father. The pagan world is a weird, weird place.

And then we notice something else here. King Ahab says to Elijah, "You troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). That word is an interesting word (ʿākar, עָכַר). It means to "bring chaos, disorder, throw into confusion, ruin" (Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner (1958), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill) Vol. II, p. 824).

And Elijah throws it right back at the king. He said, "I have not troubled. I'm not the one that's brought trouble and chaos. You," he says, "you and your father's house have done this, by abandoning the Lord" (1 Kings 18:18). That's an interesting thing. And then there's something else I think that's interesting here.

THREE AND A HALF YEARS

We read in chapter 18, verse 1, after a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah. It's interesting that there are two passages of Scripture where that specific time is mentioned. First, turn with me, if you would, to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4 and verse 25. Luke chapter 4 and verse 25, and this was something that almost got Jesus killed when he said this, by the way. Luke chapter 4 and verse 25. And that's on page 1596. And let's start with verse 24.

24 “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.” (Luke 4:24-26)

Now think about that for a moment. Where did God send Elijah to hide from Jezebel? He sent him back towards her hometown. Zarephath is a suburb of Sidon, and she was the daughter of Ethbaal, who was the king of Sidon. So that’s where Elijah’s sent. And notice that he heals this widow. He heals this widow. And then he mentions, and we have to read on to get the thing, he says in verse 27:

And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian. (Luke 4:27)

And Jesus is citing these incidents from Elijah and Elisha, and he’s saying that God didn’t send these miracle workers to heal people in Israel, he healed them to heal people in Sidon and Syria, Damascus. And notice the reaction. You ever wonder why Jesus was crucified?

The reaction, verse 28:

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)

Now, I want you to turn with me to the book of James for a moment. James chapter 5. And once again, we’re told this is three and a half years. This is striking. James chapter 5, right after the The book of Hebrews, James chapter 5, and we read these words here in page 1885. And I’d like to get it again in context.

Look at James chapter 5 verse 13.

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16)

Now notice verse 17. And remember, righteousness is not that we're good. It is that we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and his righteousness has been put to our account. So when we pray, we pray in Jesus' name, because when we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are covered by his righteous, holy life, and our sins have been forgiven. And so it's really the believer. And he says there: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

Verse 17: "Elijah was a man just like us."

You say, "You know, man, I wish I could see God do things the way Elijah did."

What are you saying? Hey, you know what? You're just like he was.

"Do you mean that?"

Yes, sir.

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain. 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).

Now, I want to make a comment there as we go back to 1 Kings 18. We were in a terrible storm today, and that's why we were running late. And the radar showed it. And Sandy said, you need to pray. We've got to get through this. And you know what I did?

I said, “O Lord God! You are the God of Elijah! You are Lord over the wind and the rain. You are the Lord over everything. Baal is not Lord. You, Yahweh, are Lord over everything. I ask you, Lord Yahweh, that you would overcome the power of Baal, who sends storms according to Canaanite mythology, and that you would stop this.”

And what happened, Sandy?

“Great morning. We can see sunshine.”

It was truly amazing.

You know,

We have not because we ask not. We ask and receive not because we ask with the wrong motives (James 4:2-3)

But we had godly motives. I wanted to get here. I felt called by God to be here today. And this weather was terrible, with the wind blowing and the rains coming down and the flooding.

My son-in-law is trapped and can't get home. He had his father's funeral that went on last week, and he's trapped by all the flooding...to get to his place in the hill country. All of that.

Where is the God of Elijah? I want to tell you where he is. He's on Robeson Road in Texarkana, Texas, right here, right now. And so we see that we call on the name of the Lord.

BAAL*

And remember again, as I pointed out two weeks ago, Baal, Baal is a thunder god. Baal is the god of vegetation. Baal is the god of plenty of food. Baal is the god of fire. Baal is the god of sex. That's who he is.

ASHERAH**

And what about Asherah, as we turn back there? She is the goddess married to El, who was the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon. Married to El, but yet she seemed sometimes to be involved with her own son, Baal. And the

name Asherah is often associated with woods and trees because of nature worship.

And I think about modern America. Sex and technology, wow! Baal and Asherah. And so we see these things here.

Now I asked the Lord this question. I said, Lord, it's explicit in the New Testament, both the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and the testimony of his half-brother, James, because this is not the Apostle James. This is the son of Mary and Joseph.

Jesus was not the son of Joseph. Jesus had no human father, but his father and mother, it's extremely clear as we read the New Testament, went on to have other children. And James is one of the brothers of the Lord, a half-brother of Jesus.

And so Jesus himself tells us it was three and a half years, and his half-brother James tells us it was three and a half years, and I scratched my head and said, Lord, why three and a half years? What's the significance of that?

And I thought, and you might want to turn there just for a moment, to the book of Daniel, chapter 7, and verse 25. Daniel chapter 7, and verse 25. And we read there these words.

He (and this refers to the great opponent of the Lord) will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. (Daniel 7:25)

A time, times, and half a time. What is that? That's three and a half years. A time: a year, times two years, and half a time, three and a half years.

Now, I'm only throwing it out; I can't be dogmatic at this point: is that three and a half years is a period of time of intense trouble. Three and a half years is a time of intense trouble.

By the way, nowhere in the Bible are we told there will be a seven-year period of tribulation. You've heard Bible teachers teach that. Where do they get that? They get it by misreading the book of Daniel.

What are we told in the New Testament in the book of Revelation? There's a three-and-a-half-year period of intense trouble. So I'm not expecting a seven year period of tribulation. I know that there was intense suffering in the New Testament, and it's going to be recapitulated, but everywhere in the book of Revelation, it isn't seven years of trouble, it's three and a half years of trouble (Revelation 11:2; 13:5; 11:3; 12:6; 12:14). So that's an important thing. Time, times, and half a time. So three and a half years of tribulation, and that's a topic of study for another day.

So going back to 1 Kings chapter 18, we know who Baal is, we know who Asherah is, and we know that Ahab has allowed his wife, the daughter Ethbaal, to kill the Lord's prophets.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

And let me say this, religion is a striking and deadly thing. Religion is a striking and deadly thing. Real religion, that is a person's ultimate concern. What is religion? It's a person's ultimate concern. It's a person's greatest value. It's what they esteem more highly than anything else. That's that person's religion.

You know, you don't have to believe in God to be religious. You know, the Supreme Court said, among religions that do not believe in God, they cited Buddhism. Buddhism doesn't believe in God, but Buddhism is a religion (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488 (1961)).

So a person's ultimate concern is their religion. And let me tell you, religion is always going ultimately to be intolerant of other religions. That's why What happens in Israel under Ahab and his wife Jezebel is that they first come in, and they're not real open about things, as we saw two weeks ago. But then they become more open in their actual worship of Baal and of the Asherah. And what do they do?

Religion will always squeeze out rival religions. Look at the United States of America. Think about it. We began to squeeze the God of the Bible out of our public life, beginning in the early 60s. And what happens?

Religion hates, excuse me, nature hates a vacuum. Religion hates a vacuum. Where are we today? Where we are today is that we have outlawed to a substantial degree the religion of the New Testament. We have outlawed to a

substantial degree the practices of the first leaders of the United States. Was America founded to be a Christian nation?

The answer to that question is yes and no. No, it was not founded that they would officially adopt Christianity as the religion of the United States. Religion was left in the matter of state governments, not the federal government. And “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor restricting the free exercise thereof.” (*The Constitution of the United States of America*, Amendment I) Congress, the U.S. Congress. Religion was left to the states. And so most of the states in the 13 original colonies had established religions. Virginia had the Church of England, and we can see that. Most states had some established religion.

Did it mean that people were forced to adopt that religion? No, but they were forced to live by the moral standards that were agreed on by all Christians. And that’s why, if you read the U.S. Constitution, you discover that the president has 10 days to sign a bill in order for it to become law. But there’s a statement in there that says, Sundays accepted.

If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the Same shall be a Law, in like Manner as if he had signed it, unless the Congress by their Adjournment prevent its Return, in which Case it shall not be a Law. (*The Constitution of the United States of America*, Article 1, Section 7)

Why not the Jewish Sabbath accepted? Why not the Muslim Friday accepted? Because America was founded with Christian principles of law and justice, meaning that we would live by the Ten Commandments as they were understood by Christian people, not by Jewish people, not by Muslim people.

And so America was founded to be a Christian nation **in the sense of God’s moral law**. And when I was a boy in the public schools of South Carolina, we memorized the Ten Commandments. Why did we memorize the Ten Commandments? Because we agreed that that was a standard of morality for everybody.

And that's why lawsuits were filed by four Jewish people challenging the blue laws. And they stated very plainly that the origin of these laws is the Christian religion with its holy day, Sunday.

McGowan v. Maryland; Two Guys from Harrison-Allentown v. McGinley; Braunfeld v. Brown; and Gallagher v. Crown Kosher Supermarket. "The parentage of these laws is the Fourth Commandment; and they serve and satisfy the religious predispositions of our Christian communities."

And so you've got to understand that America has radically changed in my lifetime. We still had prayer in school when I was a boy. Even when I graduated from Myrtle Beach High School, we still had prayer in schools. We still read the Bible in the public schools. We memorized the Ten Commandments when I was in elementary school. We did all the things.

Where are we today? We've abandoned the Lord. And what's the result?

I think that you can say that America has been troubled, just as ancient Israel was troubled. "You troubler of Israel, Elijah." And Elijah says to Ahab, "You and your father's house have troubled Israel." (1 Kings 18:17-18)

So where are we as we look at this? We discover that Ahab is challenged by Elijah. Now, Ahab obviously believed in Baal, and Ahab obviously believed in the Asherah. He didn't just conform, he did it deliberately.

Under the influence of his wife, he did it openly, but he believed it. As we saw three weeks ago, there is strong evidence that Ahab's father, Omri, was actually not from Israel, but was connected with the twin cities of Tyre and Sidon.

NOT JUST IDOLATRY, SWITCHING GODS

And so he, Omri, begins this change. He, Omri, we saw three weeks ago, is the one that begins to introduce terrible things. Omri went far beyond the sin of Jeroboam I and the sin of Basha, which was simply setting up a rival place of worship and using visible images of God, creating three-dimensional objects to represent God.

What Omri does, unlike the four preceding kings of Israel, is to introduce paganism, and his son Ahab (my brother my father, and his wife Jezebel (‘iyzebel, אִיזֶבֶל, meaning “Where is the Prince,” referring to Baal), the prince. They openly worship Baal and the Asherah. And we see something else. I find this really intriguing.

LEX REX OR REX REX

Holding your hand there on page 557, you look over and you see something really interesting, I think. And that’s on page 563. That’s 1 Kings 21. We’re looking at King Ahab of Israel. What was he like? Who was this man? Look at this man. He was a mama’s boy. And chapter 21, verse 1:

1 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 Ahab said to Naboth, “Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.” (1 Kings 21:1-2)

Now you need to understand that in ancient Israel, nobody owned the land. Nobody owned their own property. It was the Lord’s property that they rented, if you want to think of it that way. They were tenants on the Lord’s property. And that’s why, under the Old Testament law, every 50 years, people got all their debts canceled.

If they had been enslaved because of debt, they were free, and they got to do what? They got to go back to the homestead of their ancestors. So the land never, never was permanently sold. except in the case of priests and their cities.

So Ahab says, look, he said, I’ll pay you whatever it’s worth, but look at what he says in verse three.

But Naboth replied, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” (1 Kings 21:3)

Now, if you ponder that, you’ll notice under verse three, those references, Leviticus 25:23 and Numbers 36:7. You might want to look at that later.

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. (Leviticus 25:23)

No inheritance in Israel is to pass from tribe to tribe, for every Israelite shall keep the tribal land inherited from his forefathers. (Numbers 36:7)

So Ahab, verse 4:

So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. (1 Kings 21:4)

This Ahab, this son of Omri, (My father ... my brother is my father). This rascal is lying on the bed, pouting.

"I'm just pouting, I'm going to lie here. I'm all down in the dumps. I don't know what I'm going to do."

Now watch this. Look here at verse 5.

His wife Jezebel (Where's the prince? She's a worshiper of the prince, Baal) came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" (1 Kings 21:5)

She knew how to work the boy. She knew he was a mama's boy. She knew that he was a weakling. She knew he was a coward. And she knew how to manipulate him.

He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" (1 Kings 21:6)

Now look at verse seven.

Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." (1 Kings 21:7)

Wow.

And what did she do? You know the story. We'll probably look at that later on in a few weeks.

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. (1 Kings 21:8)

And with those letters, she wrote. And so this is how she got it. She basically said, aren't you king? What did she believe? I want to tell you what she believed.

She believed that the executive branch of government could do what it jolly well pleased by executive order. That it was not bound by God's law. It was sovereign and absolute.

Let that sink in!

Jezebel believed that the king had absolute authority to do what he wanted to do. If he wanted that piece of land, by executive order, he would have it. Except his wife gave the executive order while he was wherever he was mentally.

And so here you see something I think is very significant, and it's very significant. When government is not restrained by the law of God, Government will always be a tyrant. You know, there was one of the delegates or commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. His name was Samuel Rutherford. Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish minister, and he wrote a number of books.

In fact, he wrote a book during the meeting of the Westminster Assembly, in which he stated clearly that he believed that prophecy continues, that foretelling the truth continues, that revelation continues, but it's always subordinate to the written word of God. He wrote that, and I have a copy of that book, courtesy of University Microfilms of Ann Arbor, Michigan.***

But he wrote that book, but he also wrote a book before that, entitled *Lex Rex*. What does *Lex Rex* mean? *Lex* means law. *Rex* means king. What was

Samuel Rutherford getting at? **The law is king. And the king is subject to the law.** And that comes right out of the principles we see here.

MODERNITY

But modern government, abandoning God's law, says that the executive branch is king. And we're not going to tolerate even the most important branch of government, which is not the executive. nor the judicial, but the legislative. Congress, in our Constitution, is the chief branch of government. And the executive branch carries out the will of the Congress.****

Lex rex, the law is king. When you abandon that, then the executive branch becomes king. And we see so many parallels today.

So we go back here to chapter 18, and we see here that Elijah has challenged Ahab to a contest, and he says, meet me at Mount Carmel. And that is an amazing story. God willing, we will pick it up there next week. But, to be continued like a Saturday morning matinee, I just want to bring this to a couple of practical points.

We live in an era of lawlessness, unprecedented in the history of this nation. What's the solution?

THE SOLUTION

There is no solution. There is no solution. Do we need a stronger national leader? Do we need this? Do we need that? You know what the solution is?

There's only one. It's to get on our face before God and confess:

“Lord, we're overwhelmed with crime in our cities, with lawlessness, with murders everywhere.”

Think of poor New Orleans and the murders going on there. Think of the murders that go on here in Texarkana. Think of the murders that go on in Alexandria, Louisiana, near where I live. Think of all that. What's the solution? There's no solution.

The solution is to get on our face before God and say:

“Lord, we’re up against crushing, crushing things. And we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” (2 Chronicles 20:12)

That’s the beginning of healing of this nation. That’s the beginning of healing of the Christian church. The Christian church is sick.

The Christian church fails to preach the law and the gospel. The law drives us to Christ, and the gospel rescues us from the condemnation of the law. The church of the living God must once again hold out these two things before the people of God: God’s law, which is clear and unchangeable because God’s law is a refraction of his own character, and the Holy Gospel, because the Gospel is the only relief for sinners.

I was greatly blessed when I attended the funeral of Sandy’s and her sister Pat’s father’s favorite cousin in Jacksonville, Florida. We had a week of death last week, unprecedented in our lives, including the grandmother on Friday of our son-in-law who died, and she raised him.

And I just want to thank also publicly David Durden, who went to see a very dear friend in the wake of her husband’s death. And so here we are. We don’t know what to do, but you know what?

I stood up in that Baptist church where this lady was being buried, and I said, “I have never heard so much about Jesus in any funeral.” I said, “I’ve been a pastor for many years, and most funerals are full of malarkey.”

I remember one time I was standing next to a man, who at the time was not a believer, and he had rented an apartment, he and his wife had, to her grandmother, who was an old drunk.

And her pastor, who did believe the gospel, but I don’t know what happens to preachers when they do funerals. They don’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings, and he went on and on and on about what a wonderful woman she was.

And the man leaned over to me, and he said, a bad word, and said, “She was just an old, cruel, mean drunk.”

Funerals are full of malarkey. I heard all about Jesus at Sandy's father's favorite cousin's funeral on Thursday in Jacksonville, Florida. All about Jesus.

That's what this church is all about. We're to be about Jesus.

But not Jesus as an abstraction, but Jesus who fulfills the law of God, a permanent standard of righteousness for every man, woman, and child throughout the entire world.

And the relief comes at the foot of a cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This morning, in a few minutes, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. That's what it's all about. It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you good enough to take communion today? I'm not!

But Jesus was good enough in my place. That's what it's all about.

Don't take the Lord's Supper if you think you're good enough. The caution is not, examine yourselves and don't take if you've got this or that.

The examination is, do you have unconfessed sin in your life? If you have unconfessed sin in your life, confess it to God. The moment you confess your sin to God, at that moment it's washed away, it's gone, it's no longer against you.

What's the difference in God's chastisement of a believer and God punishing people for sin?

God chastises his children so we will let go of our sin and cast ourselves on his mercy in Christ.

God never punishes believers for their sins. He punished Jesus in the place of believers.

And therefore, if you've got something in your life you need to deal with, we will take a moment now.

Pray and ask the Lord to show you what it is, and then lay it at the feet of Jesus, and say, “Lord, I’m not strong enough to overcome it, but I ask you to forgive me, and I ask you to wash my sins away.”

And then come, take the Lord’s Supper, take it in a reverent manner, but take of it with peace and joy, because Christ Jesus shed His blood for you.

May we pray.

Lord, bless us as we gather together to take the Lord’s Supper now, and grant, O God, that we may have true communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus’ sake, amen.

Notes

Baal*

In addition to its appearance in compound names of people and places (e.g. Jerubbaal, Jud 9:16; Baalzephon, Ex 14:2), בַּעַל is the name of a great active god in the Canaanite pantheon and has other religious connotations.

The god Baal met in the OT is the West Semitic storm god, b‘l (sing.) and b‘lm (pl.), encountered in Egyptian texts (from fourteenth century B.C. on), Tell Amarna Letters (fourteenth century B.C.), Alalakh Tablets (fifteenth century B.C.), Ugaritic texts (fourteenth century B.C.), Amorite proper names from Mari, Tell al-Rimah, and Chagar Bazar, and later in Phoenician and Punic texts. Both within the Bible and outside it the name appears either absolutely or in construct with place names; e.g. Baal-peor (Num 25:3, 5), Baal-berith (Jud 9:40), Baal-zebub (2 Kgs 1:2). (Baal-zebub, “lord of flies,” is a parody on his name found elsewhere, b‘l zbl, “Prince Baal.”) These names do not denote various gods with the epithet “lord,” but local veneration of the same West Semitic storm and fertility deity called simply Baal, “Lord.”

Scholars used to think that the plural form with the article, “the Baalim” denoted different local numina, but the plural form of

the name occurs outside the Bible and the mention of “lovers” and “strangers” (Jer 2:25) suggest another use of the plural than that of a numerical plural. The article occurs frequently in Hebrew with proper names whose meaning is transparent.

Since the biblical writers did not intend to teach the Canaanite religion, we know more about Baal’s roles, consorts, and cult from the extra-biblical literature than from the OT; but the picture of Baal presented in the OT comports well with the extra-biblical sources.

He was also called Haddu (=Hadad). He is above all the storm god who gives the sweet rain that revives vegetation. Dry years were attributed to his temporary captivity or even death. But at his revivification fields, flocks, and families became productive. **In addition, he is a war god and fertility deity who consorts with Anat (is later equated with Astarte). Both by reciting the myth of his role in reviving life at the autumn new year festival and by magical ritual of sacred marriage represented in the cult by the king, the queen and a priestess, the West Semites hoped to ensure the earth’s fertility.** [This ritual is witnessed to in Babylon but not clearly in Canaan (cf. H. Frankfort *Kingship and the Gods*, also Kitchen, K. A., *Ancient Orient and the O.T.*, Inter-Varsity, 1966, p. 104). It should be noted that the identification of Baal as an annually dying and rising god with the Babylonian Tammuz has lately suffered. New Sumerian tablets published by S. Kramer show that Tammuz died once for all and C. H. Gordon has argued that Baal too had no annual death and resurrection. See the whole discussion with refs. in E. M. Yamauchi, “Tammuz and the Bible” *JBL* 84: 283–90. R.L.H.] Archaeological cultic objects with exaggerated sexual features, as well as the myths themselves, support the OT notices about the degraded moral features associated with the cult.

Throughout the period of the judges, Israel succumbed to this infectious cult (Jud 2:11 ff.; 6:25) and had to be rescued from its tragic consequences by Yahweh’s judges. During the period of the Omrides, Baal worship became the official state religion of the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 16:31). Leah Bronner has

presented convincing argument that **Israel's miracles by Elijah and Elisha served as a polemic for God against the very powers attributed to this pagan nature deity, namely, fire (18:17ff.; 2 Kgs 1:9–16), rain (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:41–46), food (17:1–6, 8–16; 2 Kgs 4:1ff.); children (4:14–17); revivification (1 Kgs 17:17–23; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20–22, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics Against Baal Worship*, Leiden, 1968.)** But their miracles did not rid the land of this degraded cult and it brought about the captivity of the northern kingdom (Hosea).

It also infiltrated the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 11:18; 21:2ff.), and in spite of Josiah's reform (23:4ff.), brought the nation into exile (Ezek 16; 23 etc.).

The Hosea discourse describes how Israel, who received gifts of grain and oil from YHWH, used these for the worship of Baal (Hos 2:8 [H 10]). The chapter fairly turns on the term **לַעֲבָד**, not only in the mention of the Canaanite god(s) (e.g. 2:8 [H 10]; 2:13 [H 15]; and 2:17 [H 19]), but in the imagery throughout of God as Israel's husband. Israel will call the Lord her husband (**יְהוָה**, 2:16 [H 18]; cf. 2:2 [H 4]; 2:7 [H 9]) and no longer call him, apparently along with the list of other gods, my Baal (**לַעֲבָד**). God's supremacy over Baal is constantly affirmed. However man's preoccupation from then and until this day is rather with sex and technology, than with devotion to the almighty God of history, who is also the covenant God.

Bruce K. Waltke (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute), vol. 1, pp. 119-120, emphases mine

Asherah**

אֲשֶׁרָה. *Asherah*. Both a Canaanite goddess and a wooden cult object in the OT. The word is translated “groves” in the KJV presumably on the basis of the LXX ἄλσος and *nemus* in the Vulgate. Before examining the OT itself we turn to the famous Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra. It is they which tell us who Asherah was. Her name is a feminine participle of the Ugaritic

verb *'tr* (Heb אָצַר “to go”). **One of her titles is *rabbatu atiratu yammi*, “Lady Atirat of the Sea,” or “the lady who treads on the sea.” She is the consort or wife of the divine El, and as such enjoys the title *qaniyatu elima*, “progenitress/creatress of the gods.” Her most famous son was Baal. A characteristic of all mythological literatures is “in the beginning there were two.” In the Bible, however, we meet “in the beginning there was one.” The issue is not simply arithmetic. The fact that one does not read about Mrs. God in Gen 1 and 2 may be one of the Bible’s ways of stating that only God finds fulfillment in himself.**

In one of the famous mythological texts from Ugarit, the Kret epic, it is predicted to Kret of his bride that “she will bear you seven sons/and an eighth (daughter) ‘Octavia’/she will bear you the lad Yasib/who will suck the milk of Asherah.” Hence, (divine) life is guaranteed and bequeathed.

To turn to the OT, there is no actual description of an Asherah there. Was it a tree, a pole, some kind of tree symbol, an image? It apparently was not a natural object but one that was constructed by man, an artifact. It was “made”: 1 Kgs 16:33; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; it was “set up”: 17:10; 2 Chr 33:19; Isa 27:9; it was “built”: 1 Kgs 14:23. Only once is the verb “to plant” used, Deut 16:21, and here the meaning is “implant.” The conclusion then is that **in the OT Asherah stands for the Canaanite goddess represented by a carved wooden image implanted into the ground, usually adjacent to an altar dedicated to the god Baal and located on a hilltop under a leafy tree (Patai).**

It is in the period of the divided monarchy that the Asherah cult flourished both in Israel and Judah, though its existence before is documented by the command in Ex 34:13, the prohibition of Deut 16:21, and the incident at the threshold of Gideon’s life of service to God, Jud 6:25ff. Rehoboam’s career marks the beginning of this in Judah (1 Kgs 14:23). **In the north the cult received its greatest momentum from the incentive of Jezebel who was responsible for the presence of “four hundred prophets of Asherah” (18:19). Even a reform-**

minded king such as Asa (15:13) or later Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4) **was unable to liquidate the movement. It was knocked down, but not knocked out.** There was an almost inevitable resurrection even in the wake of reform. Compare son Manasseh's policy (2 Kgs 21:7, even to the point of placing the image in the temple) on the heels of father Hezekiah's reform (18:4). **Apostasy and idolatry just behind revival! What one generation attempts to get rid of a subsequent generation may trot back in, however reprehensible it may be. All too frequently this has been the pattern in the human race.**

Victor P. Hamilton (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute), vol. 1, pp. 81-82), emphases mine

Rutherford ***

Samuel Rutherford (1648), *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist Opening the Secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme in the Antichristian Doctrine of John Saltmarsh, and Will. Del, the Present Preachers of the Army Now in England, and of Robert Town, Tob. Crisp, H. Denne, Eaton, and Others. In Which Is Revealed the Rise and Spring of Antinomians, Familists, Libertines, Swenck-feldians, Enthysiasts, & c. The Minde of Luther a Most Professed Opposer of Antinomians, is cleared, and Diverse Considerable Points of the Law and the Gospel, of the Spirit and Letter, of the Two Covenants, of the Nature of Free Grace, Exercise Under Temptations, Mortification, Justification, Sanctification, are Discovered,* (London: Andrew Crooke)

Constitution ****

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States , which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives. (*The Constitution of the United States of America*, Article I, Section 1.)

The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. (*Ibid.*, Article II, Section 1.)

The judicial Power of the United States shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may

from time to time ordain and establish. (*Ibid.*, Article III, Section 1.)