

# Breaking the Silence

Discovery of the Principles of the Altar and the Remnant  
in relation to the Kingdom of God  
Volume I – Old Testament

by

Fred Saleh

Acts13  
CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

[www.acts13.com](http://www.acts13.com)

3160 Steeles Ave. East  
Suite #208  
Markham, ON L3R 4G9  
Canada  
Tel: (905) 944-9206

3786 La Crescenta Ave.  
Suite #202  
Glendale, CA 91208  
U.S.A.  
Tel: (818) 957-3407

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in Relation to the Kingdom of God  
Volume I — Old Testament  
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# Table of Contents

	Preface	7
1.	The Kingdom of God	11
2.	Identified with the Altar	17
3.	Separated unto the Altar	23
4.	Contending for the Altar	29
5.	One True Altar — Many Counterfeits	37
6.	Men of God — Beware!	45
7.	Sweet and Pleasant Conformists	51
8.	Breaking Down and Building Up	57
9.	The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom	65
10.	A Call for the Kingdom	75
11.	The Church Versus the World	81
12.	Preparing the Remnant	87
13.	Knowing the Character of God	95
14.	Prepared for the Day of Confrontation	103
15.	The Sad Status of God's Servants	111
16.	"O Troubler of Israel"	121
17.	The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars	129
18.	The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar	137
19.	The Consuming Fire from Heaven	145
20.	The Reward — A Chariot of Fire	153

# Table of Contents

Preface	7
1 The Kingdom of God	11
Three Facets Defining God's Kingdom	
The Battle Contending for God's Sovereignty	
The Altar Committed to God's Character	
The Remnant Expressing God's Testimony	
2 Identified with the Altar	17
The Altar Representing God's Lordship	
The Altar Burning with the Fire of Consecration	
The Altar Testing the Remnant's Reality	
3 Separated unto the Altar	23
A Constant Conflict	
A Precedential Altar	
A Seducing Idol	
A Separated Remnant	
A Faithful Minority	
4 Contending for the Altar	29
A Faithful Remnant with an Undefiled Heart	
A Deteriorated Priesthood with a Corrupt Heart	
A Godly Judge with a Faithful Heart	
A Man-Appointed King with a Disobedient Heart	
A God-Appointed King with a Fallible Heart	
A Successor with an Idolatrous Heart	

<b>5</b>	<b>One True Altar — Many Counterfeits</b>	<b>37</b>
	The Consecrated Life of a Total Sacrifice	
	Two Controversial Altars of a Divided Kingdom	
	A Convenient Religion without any Personal Sacrifice	
	A Counterfeit Worship with a Fraudulent Imitation	
<b>6</b>	<b>Men of God — Beware!</b>	<b>45</b>
	Compromised Unity ... Counterfeit Cross ...	
	Convenient Grace ... Contemporary Worship	
	Uncompromising Faithfulness of the Man of God	
	Compromising Conformity with an Old Prophet	
	Vigilant Watchfulness of God's Remnant	
<b>7</b>	<b>Sweet and Pleasant Conformists</b>	<b>51</b>
	Internal, Insidious Influence	
	Sweet, Pleasant Influence	
	Sanctified, Non-Conforming Influence	
<b>8</b>	<b>Breaking Down and Building Up</b>	<b>57</b>
	A Faithful Remnant's Love for God's Kingdom	
	A Faithful Remnant's Reward for Non-conformity	
	A Faithful Remnant's Endurance to the End	
<b>9</b>	<b>The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom</b>	<b>65</b>
	The Defiance of Samaria's Idolatrous Altars	
	The Testimony of Moses' Final Commandment	
	The Testimony of Joshua's Final Challenge	
	The Testimony of Shechem's Memorable Covenant	
	The Testimony of Jericho's Ruined Walls	
<b>10</b>	<b>A Call for the Kingdom</b>	<b>75</b>
	Elijah — a Kingdom Representative	
	Matthew — a Kingdom Gospel	
	Christianity — a "Kingdomless" Religion	

<b>11 The Church Versus the World</b>	<b>81</b>
The True Objective of the Church	
The Challenge of the One True Church	
A Benign Good World and a Malign Bad World	
The Alternative to the World	
<b>12 Preparing the Remnant</b>	<b>87</b>
1. Stand before the Living God	
2. Identify Yourself with the Lord in Prayer	
3. Learn to Refuse the Glory of the Flesh	
4. Rely on the Promise of God's Providence	
5. Obey by Abolishing your Religious Background	
6. Take Time to Receive Further Light	
<b>13 Knowing the Character of God</b>	<b>95</b>
The Lessons of Faith in God's Providence	
The Lessons of Faith in God's Resurrection	
<b>14 Prepared for the Day of Confrontation</b>	<b>103</b>
"A Light to the Gentiles"	
"The Heavens Are Shut Up"	
"The Enemies of the Cross"	
"Go, Present Yourself to Ahab"	
<b>15 The Sad Status of God's Servants</b>	<b>111</b>
The Impotent Religion of a Servant of God	
The Worldly Friendships of God's Servants	
Two Categories of God's Servants	
<b>16 "O Troubler of Israel"</b>	<b>121</b>
Accepting Kingdom Responsibility	
Exercising Remnant Courage	
Reviving Faithful Survivors	
Challenging Faltering Christians	
<b>17 The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars</b>	<b>129</b>
The Impotence of Religion	
The Significance of the Evening Sacrifice	
"The God Who Answers by Fire"	
Two Kingdoms Represented by Two Altars	

<b>18 The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar</b>	<b>137</b>
The One Unique Altar of Worship	
A Replica Altar for a Memorial	
The Broken Altar of the Lord	
One Universal Altar for All of God's People	
The Unbroken Oneness of the Altar	
<b>19 The Consuming Fire of Heaven</b>	<b>145</b>
The Evening Sacrifice and the Death of Christ	
Elijah the Prophet and John the Baptist	
The Consuming Fire and the Consumed Sacrifice	
<b>20 The Reward — A Chariot of Fire</b>	<b>153</b>
The Uncompromising Sword of Judgment	
The Separated Temple of God	
The Training School of Discipline	
The Extraordinary Reward of Resurrection	

# Preface

Entering into full-time ministry was quite a struggle for me. Not that I was unresponsive to it or that I disliked this great privilege, but because I found the task enormous and my abilities limited. I knew it did not depend on my resources and capabilities, but on God Himself to strengthen me by the Holy Spirit in order to be able to do what is pleasing in His sight. Nevertheless, like Jacob, I wrestled with Him. And like Moses, I kept saying, “*O Lord, please send someone else to do it*” (Ex. 4:13 NIV).

In one of his messages, Bob Mumford jokingly said, “If you ever see a burning bush, **run!** Don’t stop to inquire.” Long ago, however, I had seen the burning bush, and stopped long enough to catch a fire burning in my heart for God’s work. I was still reluctant to enter into full-time ministry. Finally, the Lord showed me something which brought me to my knees. It was then that I said, “Here I am, Lord, send me.”

Now I would like to share with you what the Lord disclosed to me about **the two principles of the altar and the remnant**. Years ago, probably in 1979, the Lord opened my eyes to see the degraded situation and damaged condition of Christianity. Then the words of Jeremiah came to life: “*They dress the wounds of My people as though they were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace*” (Jer. 6:14 NIV). It became obvious to me that the visible church, to a great extent, had become a wreck. The world had penetrated the church when it was assailed under a lot of cultural, political, national, and economical



## Breaking the Silence

pressures, compelling her to conform and surrender. This condition has not changed and has in fact worsened.

Any human effort to restore it was in vain. I began to see that we are not called to restore, but to stay clear of the contamination so that the Holy Spirit can have a true witness. For years, my observations of this situation had baffled and tormented me. I did not see how I or anyone as such could possibly tackle this enormous task.

But then the Lord reminded me, according to His mercy, how He had made His will and plan known to me and imparted light concerning the principles of **the altar and the remnant**. He then gave me the peace I needed for this ministry. It was then that I bowed in adoration, wonder, and complete surrender to His will. Immediately after entering into full-time ministry, I began to write about the truth the Lord had revealed to me. I have completed these series of writings which are now available to you in book form.

As I was writing these series, I prayed and asked the Lord to use me as His humble vessel through whom He could speak to His people. It was difficult for me to ensure that nothing of me would find its way into what the Lord wanted to say to His people. However, I trusted the good Lord Himself to do the separating work and allow only His thoughts to penetrate into the readers' spirits. As I finished the last segment of the series, I immediately felt a burden taken off my shoulders.

But one fear remains — that of being misunderstood by our readers. In view of this issue, I undertook to write a preface to clarify my position.

First of all, I would like our readers to know and believe that my intention is not to criticize churches and believers for the sake of being critical, claiming a superior position over them or putting down any organization. My intention has been to unveil the current condition of Christianity from the Lord's view and perspective, just as He has shown to me.

The question is not who is right and who is wrong. The question is how much will the church, or Christianity as such, contribute to God's

## Preface

final plan and purpose. The question is how can a half-truth help or hinder the Lord's work. Some will say half-truths are better than no truth. And others will argue that half-truths pervert the truth, as ignorance is void of the truth. I will leave that judgment to our readers, who, I trust, will ask the Lord for the answer in prayer.

This we do know — the Lord will judge and reward each believer and each worker according to His expectation of them. I do not dispute the brotherhood of all saints. Yet the question is, how will each one of us stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Will we stand as the wicked and lazy servant or as the good and faithful servant? The former is deprived of an entrance, while the latter is invited to enter into the glorious rest and triumphant joy of the Lord.

It has been and still is my burden to caution all of the saints — all of my brothers and sisters in the Lord — of certain hindering factors. I may alert you sometimes in very strong terms, sometimes with tears in my eyes, but the motive is always the deepest love for each and all of you. As the Word of the Lord says, "*An open reproof is better than a hidden love.*" It is not my intention to sit in judgment over believers, as we all know the consequences of such an attitude according to His Word. Rather, my intention is to awaken anybody and everybody who would read these lines, to the prevalent crisis of the church-at-large today, according to what our Lord Himself had prophesied well in advance through His Word. I do not mean to criticize, regardless of how harsh the words may appear, but I do mean to be a warning voice from the Lord, especially for those who may still have the ear to hear.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that when I speak of the remnant, I do not intend to create a super caste or an exclusive elite. According to God's Word, the remnant is always representative and relative, never conclusive or exclusive. The remnant always stands in the breach of the wall on behalf of the brothers. The same relative and representative functions characterize all remnants — such as Elijah, King Hezekiah, King Josiah, Daniel, etc. — who confronted the enemy, not only for

## Breaking the Silence

themselves, but also on behalf of their brothers. These functions can be traced throughout the Word of God, and this is important, lest pride come in. May the Lord have mercy on us. Nevertheless, I have no choice but to tackle these issues for the Lord's glory, hoping all the while that I will not be misunderstood.

It is my sincere wish that this book will help my brothers and sisters in Christ to receive a better understanding of God's plan, His expectations, and His reward which awaits the faithful. All shortcomings and insufficiencies in these chapters are mine, and I beg your forgiveness. All good things are from the Lord Himself.

I would like to dedicate this volume to my beloved life partner, Irene, who has always been the greatest inspiration in my ministry.

My appreciation is also extended to all my co-workers in the Lord, all my local church members, and every person who has contributed — directly or indirectly — in making the publication of this book possible.

A very special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Bill Mallon in offering to edit and proofread the original manuscript.

Glory be unto His Name!

*Fred Saleh*  
*February 2001*

# Foreword

Nothing is more critical to the Body of Christ than the kingdom of God. And yet — as Fred Saleh points out in this compelling and opportune book — nothing is more neglected or misunderstood by many Christians today.

The kingdom of God is meant to be the aim of salvation. And it should be the daily exercise in each believer's life if he/she would be rewarded at the Second Coming of Christ. In his book, *BREAKING THE SILENCE*, Fred Saleh challenges us to live energetically such a kingdom life. He urges us to establish God's altar in a consecrated life so that a faithful remnant will rise up to overcome the invasive, idolatrous forces of both the secular and religious world.

It is obvious that God has deposited in the author a ministry to awaken God's children to the promised land of fulness in God's kingdom. May the Lord's message as presented in this book be sovereignly anointed of the Holy Spirit to all who read it. Modern Christianity in this new millennium desperately needs the fresh blowing of the Heavenly Wind and the new burning of the Holy Fire as evident in this volume.

During the last few years, our mutual fellowship has been a source of blessing and encouragement to me and my fellow companions. We are grateful he has put these deliberations on the meaning of the kingdom, as it relates to the altar and the remnant, into a book so they can have a wider circulation. Scriptural, searching, and practical, it is a message sorely needed in our age. No reader can ponder its truth without being challenged and changed.

— *William E. Mallon*

# 1

## The Kingdom of God

A theme that overshadows and encompasses all else in the Bible is the phrase “*the kingdom of God.*” The New Testament is very explicit and emphatic about it. John the Baptist came preaching, saying, “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:1-2). Jesus taught it and preached it (Matt. 4:17). After His resurrection, He spoke of it with His disciples (Acts 1:3).

This was also the theme of the Apostles’ teachings. Paul preached and taught it to the end of his life. To the very end, he spoke about the kingdom of God and the things of Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). The letter to the Hebrews can be summed up in one phrase: “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken...*” (12:28). And finally, the Book of Revelation can be summarized in one statement: “*Now... the kingdom of our God... have come*” (12:10).

### Three Facets Defining God’s Kingdom

Since the predominant theme of the whole Bible is the kingdom of God, it is extremely important for us to understand the proper meaning of the word “*kingdom*” and have a clear definition of the phrase “*the kingdom of God.*”

## Breaking the Silence

Many Christian scholars believe that the English word “kingdom” is not a very good translation of the original word in Greek. The real meaning of the original word translated “*kingdom*” in our English Bible is ‘sovereign rule or reign.’ As a result, the word “*kingdom of God*” should be more accurately translated ‘the sovereign rule of God.’ We will of course continue using the word “*kingdom*,” but we must keep its deeper meaning in mind. What must be conveyed is the sovereignty of God.

T. Austin Sparks has rightly attributed three aspects to the kingdom: 1) It is the sovereign rule of God. 2) It is according to an order of things which takes its character from God. 3) It is a realm where His order and nature freely operate and are expressed. We can enter this realm, but not apart from the other two aspects. So God’s kingdom is where God rules sovereignly, according to an order which expresses His character, and in a realm where everything operates according to His nature.

In other words, there is the fact of God’s absolute Lordship. And, by some mighty work of God, we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), which means that the very nature of God has been made available to us and is introduced into us, thereby setting up a new order of things. This defines the kingdom of God.

### The Battle Contending for God’s Sovereignty

The Bible unveils the plans and purposes of God in creation, but by man’s subsequent Fall, all of creation fell out of correspondence with these plans. The Fall made necessary the eventual redemption, which returned creation back to God’s eternal purpose. In His Word, God reveals what happened in eternity past, that His sovereignty was coveted and challenged by a cosmic angelic being. Since then, there has been a severe cosmic warfare over the sovereignty of this universe. Who must rule? God? Or, some other independent and rival being?

In God’s eternal purpose, mankind was first destined to be the expression, representation, and manifestation of His sovereignty in the

## The Kingdom of God

material world. Consequently, humanity was a very precious commodity, either for God or for this other entity known as Satan.

In Genesis 1:26-28, we read of God's intention in creating the human race: "*Let us make man in Our image according to Our likeness; let them have dominion.... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion....'*"

Inasmuch as Satan was vying for the kingdom, he was also contending for the vessel of its expression, namely mankind. If he could gain this vessel as an ally, he would eventually possess it and establish his own sovereignty over the earth, and then export it to the rest of creation. Thus, the battle began. And mankind became a decisive factor in this controversy.

The battle over the vessel began when Satan approached Eve and said, "You will be like God!" And when Eve accepted the lie and dragged Adam into its deception, the Fall of creation took place. On the surface, Satan had succeeded — but only on the surface. The Spirit of God will not allow a complete breakdown. He sought individuals who were sensitive to God's voice and called them to maintain His sovereignty over this world. Humanity as such had lost the understanding for the divine reasons behind man's creation and existence. Consequently, the human race had fallen into a dark state of mind. They had surrendered to a different order, the end of which was total chaos — **death!** But in the midst of this chaos, God had those who allied themselves with Him, who acknowledged His sovereignty, who accepted the order which took its character from God, and who claimed the whole world as the realm in which this order, void of death, would find expression.

## The Altar Committed to God's Character

The means by which these people proclaimed the sovereignty of God was through a simple object called *the altar*. It represented God's

## Breaking the Silence

sovereignty and character. God's sovereignty was the bedrock on which every action of God was displayed. And every type of sacrifice proclaimed a different truth.

Initially, those who erected an altar offered a "burnt offering," which indicated their total allegiance to a God Who is their Sovereign Ruler. Such were the cases of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These individuals were called to maintain the testimony of the sovereignty of God and their allegiance to Him. Their consecrated act simply made a statement to the whole universe that here is the place where "God rules." Then, later on, after God called Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt, He instituted the tabernacle worship. The sacrifices offered on its most holy altar declared a testimony that a new order according to God's character had arrived. And finally, as God led them into Canaan, He appointed a realm where this order would find full expression.

### The Remnant Expressing God's Testimony

Since Israel had failed to maintain this testimony, God called others to do so. These were either individuals or small groups called out of the majority who became identified as "the remnant." They were the ones who faithfully stood on the ground of the sovereignty of God and passed on the torch of this testimony to the remnant of the next generation, until God's testimony would find full expression in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and the Son of man.

Jesus Christ as a human being was not only the full expression of the Person and character of God, but He was also the realm in which this new order was expressed. Subsequent to Christ's death and resurrection, the Church, as a corporate living Body consisting of regenerated individuals, became that expression.

Unfortunately, the Church also lost sight of her calling and strayed into the same digressive footsteps of Israel. However, as in the case of Israel, God found in the Church a remnant who did not lose sight of its individual



## The Kingdom of God

and corporate calling. Faithfully, they kept the fire of the altar (a type of the Holy Spirit who operates on the basis of God's sovereignty) burning.

What follows within the covers of this book is a detailed look at those individuals or small groups called "the remnant" in the Old Testament; later, in another volume, we will consider the remnant in the New Testament.

It is my prayer that every one of us will recognize the sovereignty of God in our own individual lives. Then, as we find like-minded believers, we come together, and by whatever means, proclaim His kingdom. God must rule in our lives according to a new order which takes its character from Him. We must allow ourselves to become the realm in which and through which God expresses Himself and His sovereignty. There will come a day when this order will find its full expression universally, and then Revelation 11:15 will come to pass: *"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."*

# 2

## Identified with the Altar

### The Altar Representing God's Lordship

Man was created with a special privilege, a direct access, and a free approach to God. Genesis 2 portrays such a man walking with God and experiencing daily fellowship in His Presence.

However, man's disobedience interrupted this personal relationship with God. He fell out of touch with God through Satan's cunning deceit. Consequently, sin entered the human race, pervading humanity with the tragic plague of death. Man henceforth lost his free access to God and fell out of mutual relationship with Him.

Moreover, the law of God's holiness and righteousness requires punishment for any disobedience. God, Who is inherently holy, rules His created universe according to His righteousness. Any disobedience occurring within the realm of His righteous government exacts just retribution. Therefore, as one of the results of His governmental dealing with sinful man, God cannot be approached unless it be through an **altar**.

What had happened was that Eve first listened to Satan who had disguised himself as a serpent. Then she was enticed to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By doing this, mankind attempted to establish his own independent kingdom by being lord over his

## Breaking the Silence

own life. He had rejected God's kingdom to control his life. Did not Satan insinuate to Eve, "*You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God*" (Gen. 3:4-5, NKJV)? To be "*like God*" meant having **another** lordship over your life. Adam and Eve, by disobeying God, had simply declared, "We don't want Your sovereignty over our lives! We want to be free!"

Now the only way back to God was through a redemptive sacrifice on God's altar. The mention of "*skins*" (Gen. 3:21) suggests the necessity for a sacrificial altar, where the death of animals was required before skins could be provided for clothing. The sacrifice was necessary for forgiveness. Moreover, the altar represented God's kingdom and government. By building an altar for the Lord, they acknowledged again the very same divine kingdom and lordship they had denied. The only place where the sacrifice was acceptable was on the Lord's altar — not on any other altar. Forgiveness recognizes and restores the lordship of God in our lives. We can be forgiven, and yet still be lorded over by some other god. This defeats God's plan and purpose for humanity.

From page one in the Bible, we see two groups of people: One group consists of those who have rejected God's altar and found for themselves a substitute for God and His rule. The second group, though much fewer in number, approaches God Himself through His true altar. Generally speaking, this second group represents a **remnant** principle. Consequently, in God's dealing with man and in man's approach to God, these two principles are always working together — the principle of the altar and the principle of the remnant.

### The Altar Burning with the Fire of Consecration

The remnant represents those who lay their all on God's altar, for God cannot accept anything less than the entirety of the heart. He wants a complete and absolute consecration. He cannot accept a divided heart. "The altar," Watchman Nee rightly says, "signifies not man's work for

## Identified with the Altar

God, but man's total identification with God as the upholder of God's cause."

According to this basic criterion of the altar, a remnant has always existed, and they will always continue until the Lord Himself returns and establishes His Kingdom. These two principles, the altar and the remnant, have always been in full effect since the Fall of man. Even before the Jewish people came into existence, these two principles prevailed. Abel, in the first pages of the Bible, was the first of the remnant, followed later by Enoch.

During Noah's generation, the whole world was corrupted. The fire of God's altar (sovereignty) was extinguished. Was there not one person found in whom this fire of absolute consecration was burning? In Noah, God found that one person whose heart was undivided. Consequently, God saved eight souls, Noah and his family, out of the Flood which inundated the whole depraved and unredeemable world.

The world that was destroyed by the deluge did not care for God's kingdom. Immediately after the Flood when Noah emerged from the Ark, we read:

*"Then Noah **built an altar** to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing [pleasing] aroma..."* (Gen. 8:20-21, NKJV).

In response to Noah's act, see what God does:

*"Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all...'"* (Gen. 9:1-2, NIV).

Earlier, God had declared the same words to Adam, *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it"* (Gen. 1:28, NIV).

Noah, by building the Lord's altar on earth, had declared the Lord's right to the earth and trumpeted His kingdom on earth. What Adam and Eve had denied and relinquished to Satan, Noah claimed and repossessed. Adam and Eve had forfeited God's blessings and the right to rule on God's behalf. However, by erecting God's altar and sacrificing burnt offerings

## Breaking the Silence

— a token of his absolute dedication and consecration — Noah regained the blessing. And the right to rule for God was re-conferred on him. Noah certainly exemplified a remnant believer of his generation, for he was the only one who recognized God’s governmental right to rule the earth. Furthermore, by erecting the altar, Noah declared that right to the universe.

But, did all of Noah’s sons walk in their father’s way? Of course, we know the answer is “no.” Satan, determined to establish and force his own dark kingdom upon this earth, once again penetrated human hearts through deceit and corrupted humanity. However, God always has had His remnant. Regardless of how corrupt the world became, God always had those who recognized and confessed His kingdom and lordship over this earth and over their human lives.

### The Altar Testing the Remnant’s Reality

For example, God called a man by the name of Abram whose name was later changed to Abraham. He was to represent God’s remnant in a world polluted by the masses of idolatrous worshipers. He was to proclaim God’s kingdom. Abram was commanded to depart from his father’s home located in the Ur of Chaldeans and travel to the land of Canaan. What was he to do? Fight for a revolution? No. Enjoy life in Canaan? No. Did he have a purpose? Yes. Let’s read about it in Genesis 12:7 and 8:

*“Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give the Land.’ And there he built an altar to the Lord Who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.”*

What was Abram going to do? He was to herald the Lord’s kingdom in the land of Canaan. He served notice that this land belongs to the Lord. He identified himself with Jehovah by acknowledging His ruling rights to the land. Abram’s building the Lord’s **altar** declared his stand for the Lord and with the Lord. His life is marked by building the Lord’s altar wherever

## Identified with the Altar

he moved in the land of Canaan. He stood on the principle of the altar. The altar was the sign of God's rights over the place where it was erected.

Wherever the altar was built, it established the fact that Abraham stood for the principle of the **remnant** as well. The mark of a remnant is one who never relinquishes the Lord's kingdom and His rights to the earth.

But was Abraham's confession a genuine act? Was it a demonstration of a full-hearted dedication and consecration? Or, was it just a selfish act of performance, in order to secure the Lord's blessing for himself? Was Abraham's vision fully for the Lord's kingdom? Was he totally surrendering and laying his all willingly on the Lord's altar? Or, was it just an outward demonstration of a self-seeking religion? Was Jehovah's altar an engaging reality to him? Or, was he merely pretending?

All had to be eventually tested. Meanwhile, his all was laid on this altar. Finally, the day for testing his sincerity and reality arrived. Genesis 22 reveals this test on the occasion when God asked Abraham to lay his all — absolutely and unreservedly — on the altar:

*“And Abraham built the altar ... arranged the wood ... bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood” (22:9).*

Did Abraham pass the test? Did he demonstrate that God's kingdom as typified by the altar had filled all his vision, and nothing else mattered? Did he not lay his absolute all on Jehovah's altar? Did this not qualify him to be a remnant who pursued the Lord's kingdom in his own life, which henceforth acknowledged God's sovereign rights to all the earth?

Yes, he passed the test! He proved the only thing that mattered to him was God's kingdom. And now he was ready to lay his all on God's altar for the fulfillment of God's kingdom. Let's read a statement about Abraham out of God's own mouth. When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and had left Abraham standing in front of his tent, God said:

*“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation.... For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to*

## Breaking the Silence

*keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice [the principles of God's kingdom], in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him” (18:17-19).*

Abraham truly did raise his children, by commanding and teaching them to keep the way of the Lord and to maintain His erected altar in Canaan. Moreover, both Isaac his son and Jacob his grandson followed in the paternal footsteps of Abraham by also erecting the Lord's altar wherever they moved in Canaan (Gen. 26:25; 33:18-20; 35:1,7). Yes, they built the Lord's altar and declared His kingdom in Canaan, just as their father had taught them.

Notice that from among Abraham's many sons, only Isaac continued the remnant line.

Likewise, from among Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau, only one remained faithful. Jacob kept his father's instructions and walked in the way of the Lord. He kept the fire burning on the Lord's altar. Hence, Jacob qualified to continue the remnant descent. Nowhere do we read about Esau building an altar to the Lord. Whatever altar he built was to the gods which his foreign wives worshiped — never to Jehovah as the God Whose claims over the earth had to be recognized and accepted.

# 3

## **Separated unto the Altar**

### **A Constant Conflict**

It was through Jacob that God chose the nation of Israel to represent Him on earth. Israel was the remnant separated from among all nations to uphold and declare God's kingdom. How were they to do this? By keeping His altar erected and by maintaining the fire burning from generation to generation. This fire was ignited directly by the Lord Himself from heaven.

As we continue to read through the Old Testament, we can observe the conflict for the right to rule the earth. It is a battle between the forces of darkness and the people of God. The forces of darkness want to eliminate God's altar by defiling it and replacing it with Satan's altar, thus establishing Satan's kingdom and his right to rule on earth. By comparison, we see a remnant of God's people fighting back to defend God's erected altar, the burning fire, and the sacrificial offerings, thus maintaining the declaration of His eternal kingdom.



## Breaking the Silence

### A Precedential Altar

The Old Testament recounts the history of the Jewish people, their slavery in Egypt, and the Lord's intervention to deliver them from bondage. In Egypt, Israel was forced to worship at "strange" idolatrous altars. But God, through Moses, liberated them from this obtrusive worship and brought them out of Egypt for the sole purpose of establishing His kingdom in and through them. Because Moses knew God's plan, the first thing he did after bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt was to set up an altar:

*"Moses **built an altar** and called it, 'The Lord is my banner'" (Ex. 17:15). "And Moses ... rose early in the morning and **built an altar** at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 24:4).*

Hence, by building this altar, he proclaimed God's kingdom and declared Israel as its representatives.

### A Seducing Idol

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to look into an incident which may not seem very significant at first, but as we probe into its spiritual consequences, we will notice Satan's deceit and cunning. Let's read about this incident in Exodus:

*"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives and your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to Aaron.' He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool.*

*Then they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'*

## Separated unto the Altar

*When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry" (Ex. 32:1-6).*

This incident was of great importance, not only because the people of Israel were beginning to worship an **idol**, but because they were building a God-challenging **altar** before this idol. They were making a declaration for passing the rights of the kingdom to someone else, rights which belong only to Jehovah. Moses was up on the mountain to receive the Law, the guidelines for governing God's people under the lordship of Jehovah Himself. But Satan meanwhile enticed the people of Israel to declare his defiant kingdom down on earth by building a rebellious altar before the calf, despite the fact that they called it "*a feast to the Lord.*" What a paradox! They were sacrificing burnt offerings on this idolatrous altar of the golden calf, with fire ignited by man and not by God. They were thus identifying themselves with this man-made altar and declaring their allegiance to Satan. How quickly they fell and corrupted themselves! Temporarily, Satan, the master deceiver, had succeeded. But let us continue:

*"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people [no longer God's people] whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it" (Ex. 32:7-8).*

Once God's people stop declaring God's kingdom, they will corrupt themselves. Satan knows that the lordship of some other god and its worship at some other altar will eventually be accepted into their lives. Satan will use all of his forces to bring his idols before them. Every idol has its own altar. Once an idol has gained entrance in their lives, it will demand ground for its own altar in the heart. It will insist on submission, and corruption is eventually the consequence.

## Breaking the Silence

But God always has had a minority, who have stood on the principle of His altar and His sovereignty. They are those who represent Him and declare His kingdom. Although small in number, they remain faithful to Him. Wherever the altar of the Lord is seen, there His faithful remnant is also discovered.

### A Separated Remnant

Now let's see what happens invariably when God's people forget their call and mission:

*“Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so became a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.’ And all the Levites rallied to Him” (Ex. 32:25-26).*

The question is a perpetual one: *“Whoever is for the Lord?”* In response, a remnant came forth. Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, only one responded. At any time and in any place, Satan dares incessantly to replace the Lord's altar with his own. Thus, he brings God's people down on their knees before himself so that he can enslave them. Inasmuch as he is a deceiver, he makes his altar resemble the Lord's altar and calls it *“a feast to the Lord.”* But behind the scenes, Satan wants his altar erected, his rulership recognized, and his kingdom established. Nevertheless, praise the Lord, God always has had His remnant! And through them, He will always defeat the enemy even if the large majority deviate.

These two principles of **the altar** and **the remnant** continue throughout the entire Scriptures. Although God had explicitly commanded Moses and the Israelites, especially after the incident with the golden calf, to be careful in their dealings with elements which could enslave them, not long afterwards, they committed the same mistake. Notice what the Lord says in Exodus 34:

*“Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land, for when they prostitute themselves with their gods and sacrifice to them, they*

## Separated unto the Altar

*will invite you, and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. Do not make cast idols” (34:15-17).*

This command was very explicit and clear, but look what happens in Numbers 25:

*“While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor” (25:1-3).*

Clearly, the problem still remains today. Satan’s desire is to make people bow down, accept his kingdom, and erect his idolatrous altars. But Moses and the Levites stood on the principle of the remnant. They united themselves to Jehovah with the declaration that they and Israel were the people of His kingdom.

Later, God — through His ordinances, statutes, sacrifices, and the priesthood — disclosed to His people, Israel, that the altar not only represented His kingdom, but also His mercy, love, forgiveness, and holiness. The way to God was open to all if they would approach Him through His altar. Now the altar had found a new meaning for Israel. Not only did it represent God’s kingdom, but it had also become the means of worshiping Him and accepting His grace. The altar had become a representative both of God’s kingdom and of His grace.

## A Faithful Minority

Israel was required to enter Canaan and erect Jehovah’s altar where once Abraham, their father, had done so. But during the years of slavery in Egypt, the native people of Canaan had rejected the kingdom of Jehovah, surrendered to the powers of darkness, and established Satan’s altars of murder and adultery. Now God’s people were supposed to repossess the

## Breaking the Silence

land. They were to destroy all of the false Canaanite altars and replace them with the unique altar of Jehovah.

Israel was supposed to enter the promised land and claim it for Jehovah their God. They were to set up His altar in the midst of the nations. These nations had been infiltrated by Satan, who proliferated the worship of heathen idols. But from among all the people who originally came out of Egypt and wandered around in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb entered Canaan. These men represented the remnant of the original generation called out by God.

*“Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an **altar** to the Lord, the God of Israel”* (Joshua 8:30). So the altar, which represented God’s kingdom and claim on earth, remained inseparable with a few faithful called “the remnant.” The majority had succumbed to the pressures of their environment. They had given in to the desires of their personal whims.

Realizing the danger to His people who associated with the heathen nations of Canaan around them, God warned Israel beforehand not to enter into business agreements, partnerships, or marital relations with the Canaanites. The Lord knew these people would entice Israel by appealing to their carnal impulses, to the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh. These heathen nations eventually deceived Israel into bowing down to the erected altars placed in front of their idols. Consequently, the kingdom of Satan invaded the lives of God’s people. Satan’s claim to rule over Canaan and the earth was also accepted.

Despite God’s incessant warnings, Israel became entangled with the heathen nations of Canaan. From that point on, the conflict between the **majority** of Israel and the faithful **minority** intensified. The majority compromised and became conformed to the nations around them, while the **minority** became the overcoming, faithful remnant. The faithful fought back to keep Jehovah’s altar standing and undefiled. From then on, Israel’s history became a constant fight from within and without. Behind every conflict, both internal and external, stood Satan with a determination to establish his own kingdom.

# 4

## Contending for the Altar

### A Faithful Remnant with an Undeclared Heart

Time does not allow us to look into the details of how Israel failed during the times of the Judges and the Kings. Suffice it to say, a remnant has always remained faithful and kept God's altar undefiled. They approached God on the grounds required by His righteousness, holiness, and mercy. Individuals such as Gideon, Samson's parents, Jephthah, Ruth, Boaz, and numerous others maintained the remnant line when the majority had given in to worshipping idols at strange altars. This remnant upheld and supported the claim of God's rulership on the earth and in their human life.

### A Deteriorated Priesthood with a Corrupt Heart

The history of Israel finally introduces us to the absolutely corrupt era of the priesthood of Eli and his two sons. They, as priests of the Most High God, were supposed to offer divinely prescribed sacrifices on God's altar. They were to keep the fire burning so that Israel could approach Jehovah and worship Him. But instead, they had become so corrupt that they had turned the Lord's altar into an object of idol worship. They promoted prostitution and theft before that holy place. They had been contaminated by the ways and customs of the surrounding nations. Consequently, the

## Breaking the Silence

Lord judged and killed Eli and his sons according to His Word given to Samuel while he was still a young boy.

### A Godly Judge with a Faithful Heart

In contrast, Samuel grew to become God's leader in Israel, returning Israel to a true worship at Jehovah's cleansed altar. In his generation, Samuel stood out as an individual representing the principle of a remnant. It may be worth mentioning that Samuel came from a godly father and an especially godly mother, who themselves were a remnant in the midst of a corrupt Israel. Samuel became the last Judge in Israel, but he kept the Lord's altar erected and undefiled. *"There he judged Israel, and he built an altar to the Lord"* (1 Sam. 7:17).

### A Man-Appointed King with a Disobedient Heart

But Israel's corruption was so deep, that even Samuel could not purge them. A time came in Samuel's life when Israel approached him and told him of their desire — they wanted a king just like other nations. Satan was very clever. He knew he could not rule over Israel as long as Samuel was judging them, because Samuel always gave God the constant ground to rule over Israel. If Satan could only get Israel to install a man over their nation instead of God, he could once again enslave and corrupt them. So Israel, with their demand for a king, fell into Satan's trap. Remember what happened in Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden tree. They refused dependence upon God. Once again, it was the same Old Serpent manipulating the same old fallen human nature.

*"So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'*

*But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel. So he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, 'Listen to all that the*

## Contending for the Altar

*people are saying to you. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their King’”* (I Sam. 8:4-7).

How painful and how obvious it was to Samuel as to what was happening. But God is so gracious! He does not impose Himself on anyone or on any nation. Rather, as a faithful God, He told Israel through Samuel what would happen to them if they got what they wanted. As He had told Adam, *“If you eat, you will surely die,”* so here also, He enumerated to Israel the consequences of their tragic choice — total and abject slavery. Just what Satan had planned for them!

How hardened could a heart become? After Samuel told them all of what the Lord had said, they rebelled in one accord: *“But the people refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No,’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like the other nations, with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles’”* (I Sam. 8:19-20).

So Israel asked for and installed Saul as their first king. But did Saul lead them to victory as they had wished? By no means! This selfish man led a disastrous life. His life was spent in disobedience to the Lord, for he sought self-glory and had no interest in establishing God’s kingdom. Most of his years were spent in hot pursuit of David, God’s chosen vessel, of whom according to the royal line of Judah, Christ was to be born. Saul was out to destroy the promised seed. Was not this chosen king a tool in the hands of Satan? Years after he began as the king of Israel, after gaining victory in a war, he caused God’s people to sin by eating raw meat without draining its blood. Then out of sheer self-promotion and self-centeredness, he tried to look very religious.

*“Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first time he had done this”* (I Sam. 14:35).

God purposely recorded in His Word that Saul, after years of ruling his own kingdom, realized that Jehovah also had a claim on the promised land. Therefore, after many years as king over God’s people, he remembered to build Him an altar. But he built it on his own self-profit-making terms. This man, who had the chance to be a part of God’s remnant, died a very



## Breaking the Silence

tragic death. Because of his deep sin and disobedience, Israel lost a decisive war, lost their chosen king, and became captive to the Philistines. It was Israel themselves, however, who had refused God's kingdom and had desired to become like other nations. So they became what they had desired to be.

### A God-Appointed King with a Fallible Heart

I must refrain from getting into David's life in detail. But God Himself testified of David, saying that he was "*a man after My own heart*" (Acts 13:22). David not only erected Jehovah's altar, but also made all the necessary preparations to build God's temple. Thus, he brought about a better revelation of God to the people of Israel. His intentions were to bring the dwelling place of the divine King to His people. It was not, however, in God's plan for David to build the temple. It was his seed who would build the dwelling place for God. Many centuries later, as a fulfillment of the type, it was the Lord Jesus as the Seed of David, Who would build the true tabernacle and temple of God.

There is one incident that I would like to share with you. This part of God's Word cannot be understood if it is not looked at under the light of the two principles that we are studying.

*"Again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them, saying, 'Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.' So the King said to Joab and the army commanders with him, 'Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.' But Joab replied to the king, 'May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?' The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel"* (II Sam. 24:1-4).

## Contending for the Altar

In a parallel passage in I Chronicles 21:1, we read about the same incident, but with one main difference: “*Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.*”

In one experience, both God and Satan were trying to achieve their separate ends. Why was counting the number of people in Israel so important? Who was actually counting the army of fighting men? If David succumbed to this temptation and counted Israel’s fighting men, he was proclaiming only one thing — that he was king over Israel and wanted an inventory of his own fighting men. This was exactly what Satan wanted — a human king over Israel, like Saul, whom he could manipulate.

Somehow Joab realized the danger of David’s decision. He cautioned and alerted him, but to no avail. David was stubborn and fell into temptation. However, God used this temptation. God showed David what was in his heart. It was filled with the fallibility and weakness of human flesh. The result was judgment, which caused a plague to break out over Israel. But God, in His mercy, showed the way of salvation to a repentant David through His prophet Gad:

“*On that day Gad went to David and said to him, ‘Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite’*” (II Sam. 24:18).

What was David to do? By building the altar, he declared publicly who was the true Lord and real King over both the land and the people of Israel. So once again, he put God on the throne of His people and His army. This very David, when faced with Goliath earlier as a youth, had declared God’s sovereignty by saying, “*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” Now he had sinned and assumed the army to be his own. But then he realized his mistake and once again returned to his position of being a servant to the Lord God, the true King of Israel. And this he could only do by building an altar for Him and offering the sacrifices demanded by the kingdom law.

## Breaking the Silence

*“David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered prayer on behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped”* (II Sam. 24:25).

What a beautiful finale for a book! David, by erecting the Lord’s **altar**, identified himself with it and declared his strong stand in the position of a **remnant**. May God grant us the same vision.

### A Successor with an Idolatrous Heart

Solomon, David’s natural son, carried out his father’s plan and built the first temple in Israel. The results of Solomon’s efforts were the most magnificent piece of architecture ever built by man.

But, sad to say, he also introduced idolatry to Israel and erected other altars in the land for the gods of his wives who were from various nations. Hence, he not only acknowledged the Lord’s kingdom and sovereignty, but also accepted the claims of other gods to rule over Israel (I Kings 11:1-10). Solomon, with all of his wisdom, pomp, and glory, sinned and became the cause of a divided kingdom — with Israel as the Northern Kingdom and Judah as the Southern Kingdom.

Before we get into the practices of these two kingdoms with their impact and influence on each other, you may ask yourself, “What does all this have to do with us as Christians?” Before you reach a conclusion, you must continue to read. You can then judge for yourself.

Here is the answer to this question in very brief terms: These two principles of the altar and the remnant apply to Christians today. We will discover that we are not any different in our responsibility to uphold God’s kingdom, be it individually or corporately. As we continue through the Old Testament and proceed into the New Testament, we see the line of the remnant carried over from the Old to the New. The word “*overcome*,” which occurs frequently in the New Testament, will have a new meaning for us. It encapsulates both principles. By God’s grace, we will have the desire and will to fight with all our heart to be the remnant of the New

## **Contending for the Altar**

Testament. At whatever cost, we will live and proclaim the Lord's kingdom until He comes to take over and call us to be His remnant who will rule with Him.

# 5

## One True Altar — Many Counterfeits

### The Consecrated Life of a Total Sacrifice

The life of a Christian is a life on the altar. But living a Christian altar-life requires a basic moment-to-moment submission to His lordship. By cultivating such a submissive relationship, God will eventually impart to us a clear revelation of Himself, which will then bring us to the altar, as seen in Abraham's life:

*“The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the Lord, Who had appeared to him”* (Gen. 12:7).

Abraham's altar represented consecration. In order to be a consecrated Christian, we need a revelation of God. Only when an altar of consecration is established can we live an altar life.

Some may argue that the altar represents atonement. That we do not deny. However, what the altar represents depends on the type of sacrifice offered on it. According to the book of Leviticus, when a sin offering was presented, the altar represented atonement. But when a burnt offering was presented to the Lord, then the altar demonstrated consecration, and ultimately the lordship and kingdom of God — His sovereign rule.

## Breaking the Silence

This book is considering the altar from the perspective of the Kingdom in the life of those believers for whom redemptive atonement is a finished work. After the initial salvation experience, believers must still surrender their will completely to the lordship of Jesus, present themselves as a burnt offering, and live the consecrated life of the altar. At this point, the altar is not about settling the question of sin, but rather about accepting the absolute lordship of Christ by offering one's life to God. This is the kind of offering the Apostle Paul speaks of in his epistles (e.g. Rom. 12:1-2). According to the law of the burnt offering in the Old Testament (Lev. 1:3,10,14), God cannot accept anything less than the total consecration of a whole sacrifice. This means He wants not our work, but our whole heart. The altar, when we accept His undisputed lordship in our lives, signifies not **what we do** for God, but **what we are** before God.

David's failure, as we saw in the last chapter, was due to a consecration that was less than absolute. However, the Lord made him realize the deficient condition of his heart, and as a result, David repented. Later, he built an altar to the Lord as prescribed by Gad the prophet:

*“David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered prayer on behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped”* (II Sam. 24:25).

The sequence of events is interesting. First, David built the altar. Second, he brought burnt offerings, which represented his total consecration to the lordship of God. Third, he presented fellowship offerings, which characterized the ratification and confirmation of the covenant. By confirming his side of the agreement with these offerings, David declared that he could uphold the kingdom of God. This was David's way of reminding God of His covenant. Then, God also confirmed His side of the covenant by answering David's prayer.

How many times do we, like David, become the king of our lives and get ourselves into all sorts of problems. This can happen in any stage of our spiritual life. We can fall even after having enjoyed God's multitude

## One True Altar — Many Counterfeits

of blessings, as David did. But blessed be His Name! When we erect the altar, proclaim Him King, and run to His throne, the plague stops.

### Two Controversial Altars of a Divided Kingdom

As we saw earlier, Solomon built the temple for the Lord. This magnificent temple not only represented God's dwelling place among the children of Israel, but also the altar that expressed His sovereignty over His kingdom. The altar was the first item the children of Israel could see upon entering the temple.

Eventually, the temple and its altar became the subject of controversy and division. This is what happened: Israel, as a result of Solomon's sins, was divided into two kingdoms — the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom became the kingdom of Israel, consisting of ten tribes, headed by a person named Jeroboam, son of Nebat, Solomon's servant (1 Kings 11:26). The southern kingdom, consisting of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, became known as the kingdom of Judah headed by Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Jerusalem, including the temple and God's altar, became a part of Judah. According to God's commandment, all of the children of Israel — from all twelve tribes — were to go to Jerusalem to worship. Here they were to offer their sacrifices at the altar in the temple. Every Jewish male was required to go to the temple and present an offering on the Lord's altar. This identified him with the altar and with God as his King and enabled him to enjoy His grace and mercy.

However, Jeroboam, the man who inherited the northern kingdom, committed an evil act: *“And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah.’*

*Therefore, the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’*

## Breaking the Silence

*And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar.*

*So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and ordered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense” (I King 12:26-33).*

From the world’s point of view, Jeroboam was a very resourceful man. If he had lived in our day, he might have been called a great politician. A careful study of the above passage will reveal some interesting points. For one thing, Jeroboam turned his back completely on the Lord. He forgot that the northern kingdom was given to him as the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise, which was prophesied by Ahijah, the Shilonite, (I Kings 11:29-39). In his willful unbelief and unjustified fear, he became a tool in the hands of Satan. The way in which he acted is also of immense importance. Why did Jeroboam make two calves? Was it coincidental that he did the same thing that Aaron and the children of Israel had done hundreds of years before when they came out of Egypt? No, it was not coincidental.

Let’s look at the reason for Jeroboam’s actions: *“Solomon therefore sought to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon” (I Kings 11:40).*

Apparently, Jeroboam had learned the ways of Egypt and had assimilated them into the worship of Israel. What he had learned in Egypt was what he did in the northern kingdom. Through Jeroboam, Satan established his own altars and actually deployed his own kingdom over Israel. Satan’s way of polluting true worship was to mix it with the worldly ways of Egypt. Jeroboam even called it *“a feast to Jehovah.”*



## One True Altar — Many Counterfeits

Satan does not care what you call it, just as long as you bow down before his altar somewhere outside the true house of God. As long as you do not worship at the one true altar, he does not care at which altar you sacrifice. His altars are many, but the Lord's altar is one, and it is located only in His dwelling place.

### A Convenient Religion without any Personal Sacrifice

*“It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem”* (1 Kings 12:28). So asserted Jeroboam before the children of Israel, as if he were more concerned for them than God. He wanted to give them a convenient religion without any personal sacrifice. He told them they could worship nearby; so why go so far to Jerusalem? This is exactly what people tell us: ‘Don’t go so far. Why get so occupied with your spiritual life? Religion is tolerable as long as you balance your religious life with your worldly life.’ They prescribe a religion without sacrifice. They propose sacrificing at any altar, provided it is convenient. Today’s Christianity is mostly a Jeroboamic altar! The ways of the world are mixed with the ways of Jehovah. But why are God’s people so naive and vulnerable that they fall for Satan’s lies?

*“And he [Jeroboam] set up one [calf] in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan”* (1 Kings 12:29). The two cities of Bethel and Dan expose the plots and schemes of Satan. If Jeroboam had designated a city strategically located in the center of the northern kingdom of Israel, it would have made sense. But Dan was the most northern location, and Bethel the most southern city of the northern kingdom. Satan wanted to encompass the whole territory of the kingdom of Israel.

Bethel was only a short distance of about 12 miles from Jerusalem. All who worshiped at Bethel could easily have gone down to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. They should have reasoned among themselves that if Jeroboam were concerned for them, he would have designated a city in the central area of the country where everybody could gather. Perhaps Dan

## Breaking the Silence

was convenient for the northern inhabitants of Israel, but if the people in the south were going to worship at Bethel, they could have easily gone to Jerusalem. How could the people of Israel not see Jeroboam's lies?

They fell into a sinful worship at an altar which was not the Lord's. Bethel was in a crucial location for Satan. He wanted his altar only a few miles away from the Lord's altar. He wanted to establish his kingdom strategically near the borders of God's kingdom in order to intercept God's people.

### A Counterfeit Worship with a Fraudulent Imitation

Moreover, Satan has a counterfeit for every truth. For example, through Jeroboam, he declared an improvised feast. How shrewd and deceitful Satan can be!

Originally, God wanted His people to be different from the nations around them. Everything that the children of Israel did was supposed to be a testimony to their God. Israel's seven annual feasts, ordained by the Lord, were memorial as well as prophetic. One of the religious festivals was the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-36), which was in fact observed in Jerusalem on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

*“But Jeroboam ... ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah and offered sacrifices on the altar”* (I Kings 12:32).

What is the difference between these two feasts? The Bible makes it quite clear: *“On the fifteenth day of the **eighth** month, a month of his [Jeroboam's] own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel”* (I Kings 12:33).

God's festival was on the **seventh** month, while Jeroboam's festival was on the **eighth**. On whose altars were the sacrifices offered? On the counterfeit altars of other gods! Can we as the people of God distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit? Over a period of almost twenty centuries, Satan through his “Jeroboams” has ordained so many fraudulent

## **One True Altar — Many Counterfeits**

imitations in Christianity that it is hardly possible to keep track of them. The only way to see the difference between the genuine and the counterfeit is to approach the Bible, the Word of God, prayerfully.

# 6

## **Men of God — Beware!**

### Compromised Unity ... Counterfeit Cross ... Convenient Grace ... Contemporary Worship

Jeroboam was clever. His ability as a religious politician was paramount. For the sake of national unity in his own kingdom, he did what he did — erected other altars and ordained other feasts — all imitations of the originals in Judah.

Many things in Christianity are nothing but false duplicates. For example, there is much deceptive talk about unity hidden behind such slogans as “All One in Christ,” “Unity in Variety,” or “Variety Versus Uniformity.” But the question is, ‘At what price?’ At the cost of exchanging the Lord’s ordained feast of the seventh month with the compromised eighth month? At the cost of offering the sacrifices on the more convenient altars of Bethel and Dan instead of the true altar in Jerusalem?

Logically, but superficially, unity seems much better than division over many so-called minor issues. But we must ask ourselves these questions: Do we go the way of Jeroboam to practice some mediocre, imitable ceremonies based on dead, dry doctrines? Or, do we go the way of the

## Breaking the Silence

remnant who paid the price to stand for the living truth and offer their sacrifices on the unique altar in the temple at Jerusalem?

According to the New Testament, the temple of old surely foreshadowed today's true house of God. Today, Satan offers a counterfeit cross which, under the guise of grace, does not require any sacrifice, but lends itself to a convenient and overall unity. But the remnant of God's people will not fall for these "tricks" of the old serpent, the devil. They will only bow at the cross of Calvary — the altar in Jerusalem — regardless of the cost, never at the altar of Bethel for the sake of convenience and unity.

Let people call us "fanatics." The principle of the world is to mix what is true with what is not true, and present it to us in a form of Christianity that is convenient, balanced, rational, understandable, and intellectual.

Jeroboam was probably considered by his contemporaries as a patriot and a model, because from then on all the kings of Israel followed the ways of Jeroboam. These kings remained entangled in his same sin until the time of their captivity. Even hundreds of years after Jeroboam, when Israel was asked why they worshiped the way they did, their reply was, "Who are you to question us? We have been worshiping in this patriotic way — the way of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, at the altar in Bethel — for hundreds of years." Christendom has fallen in the same trap. When asked why they worship the way they do, Christians reply, "Who are you to ask us? We follow the traditions of our church fathers."

### Uncompromising Faithfulness of the Man of God

God does not remain silent in the face of such corruption. His faithful remnant has always been present and will always remain faithful to the end. God speaks today just as He did in the days of Jeroboam:

*"By the Word of the Lord, a man of God came from Judah [where God's true altar stood] to Bethel [where the counterfeit altar was located],*

## Men of God — Beware!

*as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the Word of the Lord: ‘O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says — A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.’*

*The same day the man of God gave a sign: ‘This is the sign the Lord has declared; the altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out’” (I Kings 13:1-3).*

The decree against Satan and his kingdom was thus issued. Many centuries later, Christ, the true Seed of David, will come for the second time. He will be the One Who will destroy Satan’s kingdom of deception and lies. Satan’s counterfeit kingdom with its counterfeit religion and priests will be exposed and destroyed.

Now, like this man of God, we may have already learned not to compromise with the ways of Jeroboam. However, the rest of the story also illustrates the pitfalls for the remnant in their position and stand. It shows what can happen to those who come to realize the truth and even proclaim it, how they may eventually accommodate themselves to the traditional prophets of other religious orders, to those who are ensnared in some counterfeit form of their false kingdom. Let’s take time to look at the following passages and see their immense relevance to our stand today.

In I Kings 13, this man of God was about to leave Bethel, which was a place of idol worship, to return to Judah, the place where God’s dwelling place and altar were located. Satan suddenly became active to destroy this proponent and representative of the remnant. Notice the cunning and deceit of the enemy:

*“The king [Jeroboam] said to the man of God, ‘Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift.’*

*But the man of God answered the king, ‘Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the Word of the Lord — you must **not** eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.’*

## Breaking the Silence

*So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel” (I Kings 13:7-10).*

So far so good. The man of God has recognized the scheme of Satan in a person like Jeroboam and has refused any favors from him. A direct attack has been repelled by this man of God. But notice what happens next.

### Compromising Conformity with an Old Prophet

An old prophet in the kingdom of Jeroboam found out about what had happened through his sons who were present at Bethel’s altar. He learned of God’s prophetic Word through this man of God and what events had taken place. This old prophet followed the man of God until he caught up with him:

*“Then he [the old prophet] said to him [the man of God], ‘Come home with me and eat bread.’*

*And he said, ‘I cannot turn back to go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the Word of the Lord — you must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came’” (I Kings 13:15-17).*

Now look at Satan’s masterpiece as the old prophet began to speak:

*“I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the Word of the Lord — Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water’ [he was lying].*

*So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house. While they were sitting at the table, the Word of the Lord came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, ‘This is what the Lord says — You have defied the Word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water [i.e., fellowship] in the place where He told you not to eat or drink. Therefore, your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.’*

## Men of God — Beware!

*When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was thrown down on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it” (I Kings 13:18-24).*

What Satan did not accomplish through an obviously corrupt king, he accomplished through an old religious prophet belonging to the same kingdom. The man of God should have known that God does not contradict Himself. How could God give him one set of instructions and then recant through the mouth of another?

A great lesson can be learned from the life of this man of God. We, as a remnant people, may have seen Satan’s counterfeit kingdom and counterfeit altars in Christendom. We may also have prophesied against them and declared their destruction. But we must beware of any fellowship conforming us to the old ways which we have abandoned, even if we are approached by those who come to us and say *“I too am a prophet as you are.”* If Satan does not distract you through the materialistic gifts of the world, he will try to deceive you through some old prophet who ministers in Bethel. Did not the Apostle John say the same thing as God commanded this man of God?

*“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for [like the man of God], but that you might be rewarded fully. Anyone that runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (II John 7-11).*



## Breaking the Silence

### Vigilant Watchfulness of God's Remnant

The remnant of God must have an unequivocal resolve to proclaim God's kingdom at all cost. But they have to watch out for the schemes of the enemy with a vigilant sense of danger. We should continually depend on the Holy Spirit to guard us from the deceits, lies, and the counterfeit altars, which will be placed on our way to destroy us.

We have extensively reviewed the life and history of Jeroboam. We have seen how he, by becoming an instrument in Satan's hand, had a profound impact on the Jewish nation as God's people. We must be charged, therefore, to recognize the enemy and his schemes, as he is using these same tactics in the Church of God. The Word of God leaves nothing to speculation.

Moreover, the reason for Israel's captivity has been given clearly:

*"All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God ..."* (II Kings 17:7).

After detailing their sins in verses 8 to 17, we read:

*"So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from His Presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. Therefore the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; He afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until He thrust them from His Presence. When He tore Israel away from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam enticed Israel away from following the Lord and caused them to commit a great sin. The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them until the Lord removed them from His Presence, as He had warned through all His servants the prophets"* (II Kings 17:18-23).

Let us therefore be careful to recognize the modern "Jeroboams" of Christianity, beware of their counterfeit altars, and make sure we do not persist in their ways as Israel did, lest we too fall. Let us take the solid, uncompromising stand of God's remnant.

# 7

## **Sweet and Pleasant Conformists**

### **Internal, Insidious Influence**

The story of Jeroboam ended on a sad note. Jeroboam's son became sick. The same prophet, who had once conveyed God's promise of inheriting the northern kingdom to Jeroboam, told his wife that the child would die soon. And the child did die shortly thereafter. Jeroboam's twenty-two year reign over Israel dramatically affected and influenced all of the kings of Israel and some of the kings of Judah who ruled after him for hundreds of years, until both kingdoms eventually were driven into captivity.

In order to see how the enemy, Satan, tried to penetrate the rank and file of God's people, pollute their ways, establish before them his idolatrous altars, and set up his diabolical kingdom, we must continue looking through the Old Testament. A few highlights will help us detect how the devious ways of Satan by various means were introduced into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In contrast, we will also follow the line of the remnant who were God's faithful, and who, in spite of the

## Breaking the Silence

persecutions, trials, and difficulties, remained faithful to the end, never bowing to Satan and his false altars.

**The mark of a remnant** is not perfection, but **non-conformity**. Non-conformity identifies and characterizes the lives of the remnant, both individually and corporately. Despite their weaknesses and imperfections, to them the Lord is the only true King.

While following the principles of the altar and the remnant, we must remember that we are looking at Satan's attacks from both inside and outside the domain of God's people. His attack through Jeroboam was from the **inside**, which is far more dangerous than any attack from the outside. The Jeroboamic internal influence was insidious and treacherous, which almost entirely destroyed the Jewish people. Although the attack of the enemy from the **outside** was tremendously destructive, like Nebuchadnezzar's, it did purge them from idol worship. However, in both cases, the remnant withstood the internal and external attacks and survived. By showing you the remnant line, I want to encourage God's people first to see the deceit and schemes of the enemy; then to resist him; and finally, to remain in God's purpose. Eventually, our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will appear to destroy the enemy's kingdom once and for all and to usher in His millennial rule followed by God's eternal kingdom.

## Sweet, Pleasant Influence

In the north, Jeroboam had ruled the kingdom of Israel by his false altars and counterfeit feasts. But what about the rule of King Rehoboam in the southern kingdom of Judah? Rehoboam was David's grandson. He should have done well. His grandfather had been "*a man after God's own heart,*" and Solomon his father was the man who had built the temple, the dwelling place of God in Jerusalem. But was everything well with him?

*"Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem,*

## Sweet and Pleasant Conformists

*the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put His Name. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite"* (I Kings 14:21).

Naamah was one of the thousands of Solomon's wives, a foreigner. Let's read on:

*"King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites: 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.'*

*Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and **Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites**. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done"* (I Kings 11:1-6).

Although we have already covered Solomon's era and his sin of introducing idol worship to Israel, the above passage is so full of admonition and teaching that we cannot by-pass it without observing a few points:

First, each person has a free will to follow either the Lord's way or his/her own lusts and desires. Solomon chose the latter. A second point of great importance is that children cannot become spiritual just because their father is, as was the case here with Solomon and his father, David. Third, the path of backsliding is not a steep slope, but a gradual decline, a downward trend, which begins with one single compromise. The word is back-**sliding**, not back-**falling**!

Solomon's backsliding started when he married Pharaoh's daughter. It was a political marriage and was made for strategic reasons, but it did not stop at that. Solomon eventually ended up with a thousand wives,

## Breaking the Silence

among whom many were from idolatrous nations. The longer he remained in his compromise, the weaker he became to do anything about it. As he grew older, he completely lost his will to fight the idols of his wives and capitulated to their detestable practices. Solomon was no fool. He was probably the wisest human being ever to live on the earth (except for our Lord Jesus Christ, Matt. 12:42). But **how** did Satan ever manage to bring him down to his knees?

In order to understand this, we have to look at three words indicating three key factors. Two of them were noted in the previous passage — “*Ammonites*” and “*Molech*” (I Kings 11:1-6). The other is “*Naamah*” (I Kings 14:21). The name of Rehoboam’s mother was Naamah, an Ammonite and a worshiper of the idol Molech. Naamah means ‘sweet and pleasant.’ Molech means ‘king.’ Satan brought a sweet and pleasant woman across Solomon’s path. She worshiped a god called ‘king’ (i.e., Molech). Solomon fell for this sweet, pleasant Ammonite woman, and eventually gave way to her custom of worship. He allowed her to erect an idol called ‘king’ and to build altars to her ‘king.’

Of such a woman was born a child named Rehoboam who was to inherit the southern kingdom. The sweet, pleasant influences of Naamah were so great on Solomon that he made Rehoboam the crown prince, his successor, despite the fact that Rehoboam was **not** the firstborn! Satan had worked effectively through Naamah the Ammonite, and Solomon collaborated by forcing Judah to recognize Rehoboam as king. Rehoboam’s kingship was the result of setting up the altar of Molech ‘the king’ in the territory of the southern kingdom.

In the northern kingdom of Israel, Satan had Jeroboam working for him, and in the southern kingdom of Judah, he utilized Naamah. He had partially succeeded through Solomon’s emotional collapse and intemperate desires. Succeeding generations can be affected either negatively by detrimental compromises, or positively by a strong, vigorous stand for the truth of God. Solomon acquiesced, and Judah reaped the harvest as materialized in Rehoboam.

## Sweet and Pleasant Conformists

*“Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed, they stirred up His jealous anger more than their fathers had done. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites” (1 Kings 14:22-24).*

To what levels of degeneracy did God’s people sink! Satan had succeeded in setting up his altars in Judah as well as in Israel. But this did not seem to be enough. If he could only entice Judah to enter into friendship and marriage with Israel (which he later accomplished), then his plan could be consummated. The neighboring influence of Jeroboam along with the internal influence of Naamah brought Judah to her knees; thus, Israel’s two kingdoms were about to bow down to Satan and become his exclusive kingdom.

## Sanctified, Non-Conforming Influence

In spite of Satan’s partial success in accomplishing his plan, God reserved for Himself His own remnant, who never bowed to Satan. They were the non-conformists who always proclaimed God as their supreme Lord and sovereign King. Among them were kings, prophets, men, women, children, and people from all walks of life. These were the remnant who at whatever cost kept God’s **altar** erected and God’s **fire** burning. It was through these sanctified prophets that God spoke to His people, calling them to holiness, demanding their separation from the ways of the world, and compelling them to non-conformity. Thus, He was preparing for Himself a remnant who would be on hand to welcome their only true King and usher in the eternal Kingdom of God.

# 8

## Breaking Down and Building Up

### A Faithful Remnant's Love for God's Kingdom

As we continue to study the history of God's people, we come to **the era of Asa**. Asa was Rehoboam's grandson. His great grandfather was Solomon. Regarding Asa, the Word of God says:

*“Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. **He removed the foreign altars** and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord ... and to obey His laws and commands. He removed the high places and incense altars **in every town** in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him”* (II Chron. 14:2-5).

He destroyed the “*foreign altars*” which represented the authority and rulership of other gods and kings. This included the destruction of such idolatrous altars as Molech, which were introduced to Judah by Rehoboam's mother Naamah (Asa's great grandmother). Asa also declared and established Jehovah's kingdom and rulership over Judah. Notice how he was encouraged by Azariah the Prophet:

*“The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. We went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be*

## Breaking the Silence

*found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you ... But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.'*

*When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. **He repaired the altar of the Lord** that was in front of the portico of the Lord's temple" (II Chron. 15:1-2, 7-8).*

Asa was acting on the principle of the **remnant**. He broke down the **foreign altars** and then repaired the **Lord's altar**. If Asa were our contemporary, he would be branded as unloving and ungracious. Probably, he would be advised to gain the idolatrous people of Judah back to the Lord through Christian love. But this is not how love is demonstrated. Unfortunately, the word 'love' is so loosely used in Christian circles that it has gradually become synonymous with 'compromise.' Often we keep silent for the sake of 'love,' especially when we see popular variants of the "*foreign altars*" in the context of our Christianity. This kind of 'love' has a new connotation. But from God's perspective, love is something else. Sometimes, as described in the book of Hebrews, love is corrective:

*"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son" (12:5-6).*

Asa was not being unloving and harsh toward his own people. The fact is that he, out of love for God and His people, even deposed his own grandmother Maachah from her high position as the queen mother. Maachah and others like her had become instruments of spiritual "oppression" (the meaning of her name) in Satan's hands. They were polluting God's people and perverting the truth of God's Kingdom. They had to be dealt with for the sake of everyone else. Asa stood on the ground of God's remnant by destroying the "*foreign altars*," repairing the Lord's altar, and opposing everything and everyone who exalted himself against the Lordship of Jehovah.



## Breaking Down and Building Up

Today's Christianity is polluted with foreign altars. Moreover, God's altar is in need of great repair, because it has been obviously neglected. God is looking for a remnant who will stand against this idolatry which was introduced into the church by Satan from within and without. We need brothers and sisters who will join us in the task of destroying the anti-Christian traditions of today's Christianity. We need them to bring in the simplicity of true Christianity which suits and represents the true Kingdom of God. In this task we are not fighting other Christians, but Satan and his hosts of wickedness who stand behind all of the **Jeroboams**, **Naamahs**, and **Maachahs** of Christianity. These kinds of people hold positions of power and influence and introduce all sorts of corruption into the Church of God at large. They have to be exposed and deposed from their positions of power. The same things that happened in the days of Asa must happen today. The Word of God says, "*Asa removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah....*"

The whole kingdom of Judah was polluted because instruments of the enemy were in positions of power. But praise God, He raised for Himself a remnant and placed Asa in a position of power and authority to demolish everything foreign and to declare His kingdom. Do we Christians currently act as the remnant of God's people? Do we have eyes to see the high places and the foreign altars in modern Christianity? Do we see the need for repairing the Lord's altar? Are we willing to do something about it? Or do we think that compromise under the pretext of love is going to get us off the hook of God's demands and expectations? Do we even want to be a part of God's remnant?

### A Faithful Remnant's Reward for Non-Conformity

Azariah's prophesy to Asa which strengthened his hands applies to us: "*But as for you be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.*" The reward for the remnant is great. As we proceed with these studies, we will see that a great majority of God's promises are not for

## Breaking the Silence

everyone, but are particularly for the remnant. Today, so many Christians quote these promise verses out of context. Yes, salvation by grace is indeed a free gift of God to everyone who believes. But God also has a reward especially reserved and preserved for the faithful remnant, not for the weak, wishy-washy Christians.

*“In the thirty-sixth year of Asa’s reign, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to **prevent anyone** from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah”* (II Chron. 16:1).

As the truth is proclaimed, the people of God will eventually recognize and be drawn to it. For example, the God-seeking people in the northern kingdom of Israel realized that something was taking place in the southern kingdom of Judah. Their hearts were longing for the real worship of God before the true altar in Jerusalem. Attracted to the truth, they were flocking to Jerusalem.

Why else do you think Baasha king of Israel fortified the city of Ramah? He did not want the news of the reforms in Judah to reach his people. Furthermore, he wanted to prevent his people from going to Judah to witness the changes and, as a result, permanently settling in Judah with God’s people. So Satan, working through Baasha, tried to build an iron curtain around Israel to prevent revival.

The same is also true of the remnant in Christianity. Every time a revival or an awakening begins, Satan becomes over-active in fortifying his positions by all means available to him — phony revivals, gossip, slander, wars, etc. But none has prevailed. The remnant of God’s people have fought back against every falsehood and deceit of Satan’s rule and authority. They have torn down foreign altars and repaired the Lord’s altar. Their great reward is to see people receive the truth and enter into the Kingdom of God.

As stated earlier, the mark of the remnant is not perfection, but non-conformity. Asa bore this mark. Yes, he had his shortcomings and moments of weakness, but he never conformed to the idolatry around him.

## Breaking Down and Building Up

After representing the remnant in his day, Asa went to be with his fathers and was remembered with honor:

*“Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his fathers. They buried him in the tomb that he had cut out for himself in the City of David. They laid him in a bier covered with spices and various blended perfumes, and they made a huge fire in his honor”* (II Chron. 16:13).

### A Faithful Remnant’s Endurance to the End

But before we close Asa’s era and return to the northern kingdom, it might be worth mentioning that while Asa reigned in Judah for 41 years, several kings in Israel reigned in the northern kingdom. Asa was a contemporary of Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri, and Ahab.

*“Then Baasha ... conspired against him [Nadab]. And Baasha killed him at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. Baasha killed him, in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. And it was so, when he became king, that he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according to the Word of the Lord which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he had sinned and by which he had made Israel sin, because of his provocation with which he had provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger”* (I Kings 15:27-30).

A word spoken by God is as good as done. Through Ahijah the Shilonite, God had told Jeroboam that He would destroy all of his family. Not long after Jeroboam’s death, Baasha fulfilled God’s Word by killing Nadab, Jeroboam’s son, and totally decimating his family. Why did Jeroboam deserve such a severe punishment? David had committed adultery and murder. Why was he not punished as severely as Jeroboam, who apparently had not committed such gross sins?

## Breaking the Silence

In all of his weaknesses, David had always upheld God's sovereignty and kingdom. He was a sinner, as he himself confessed to be, but a sinner under a sovereign God. Jeroboam, on the other hand, was a self-seeking man, and for reasons of self-preservation, had forsaken God's Kingdom to accommodate Satan's kingdom. He had not only bowed to foreign altars, but he had also made the ten tribes bow to a false god, and they became enslaved to Satan. David certainly had sinned against God, but not against God's Kingdom. Although he was not perfect, he never was conformed to the idolatry around him. Asa likewise was a non-conformist. But Jeroboam was conformed to the practices of the idol-worshipping nations around him and committed the sin of rebellion against God's Kingdom. Therefore, Baasha murdered Nadab, Jeroboam's son, and succeeded him as king of Israel.

Baasha, who had been instrumental in the execution of God's righteous judgment, should have known the penalty for rebellion. But "*In the third year of Asa king of Judah, Baasha the son of Ahijah became king over all Israel in Tirzah, and reigned twenty-four years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin*" (I Kings 15:33-34).

Did the killing of Jeroboam's family make Baasha part of the remnant? No! On the one hand, he had been an instrument of righteousness, but on the other hand, he had succumbed to the sin — not sins — of Jeroboam. He worshiped another god. He bowed down to a god other than the Lord.

Baasha's fate was identical to Jeroboam's. According to God's Word, his whole family was killed by Zimri, who succeeded him as king over Israel.

"... he [Zimri] went into the citadel of the king's house and burned the king's house down upon himself with fire, and died, because of the sins which he had sinned in doing evil in the sight of the Lord in *walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he had committed to make Israel sin*" (I Kings 16:18-19).

## Breaking Down and Building Up

Zimri was followed by Tibni, who was shortly afterwards succeeded by Omri.

*“Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him. **For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and in his sin** by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their **idols**”* (I Kings 16:25-26).

These seven kings of Israel who followed Jeroboam (Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri, and Ahab) were contemporaries of Asa, king of Judah. Every one of the seven kings crossed Asa’s path, but none of them could make Asa, king of Judah, be conformed to their idolatrous customs. Asa remained part of the faithful remnant and endured to the end, worshiping only at God’s altar. To him, the Lord was unequivocally King.

# 9

## The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom

In the thirty-eighth year of Asa's reign, we enter into one of the most interesting epochs of Jewish history. Three years before Asa's death, while he was still king of Judah, Omri's son, named **Ahab**, became king of Israel.

### The Defiance of Samaria's Idolatrous Altars

*“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab ... reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. Now **Ahab** the son of Omri **did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria**” (1 Kings 16:29-32).*

In the previous chapters we stated the growing effect of Jeroboam's sin, even for many generations after him, including on all of the kings of Israel and the ten tribes under their jurisdiction. Eventually, its influence escalated into the domain of Judah as well. The sin of conformity to the

## Breaking the Silence

idolatrous ways of the world had snowballed. The principle is that once the heart surrenders for any reason, Satan will find a foothold and will demand more and more. Jeroboam precipitated only a slight variation of the truth. He counterfeited two altars according to the Lord's altar and solemnized one of the feasts on the eighth month instead of the seventh month. He did not openly defy the Lord. He did everything under the pretense of the Name of the Lord.

However, forty to fifty years later, Ahab "*did more evil than any of those before him,*" which included his father, Omri, of whom the Scriptures say that he "*sinned more than those before him.*" Furthermore, Ahab did two things more evil: first, he officially introduced Baal-worship into the northern kingdom of Israel. Then, through marriage, he made Jezebel queen of Israel. Josephus, a Jewish historian, refers to Ethbaal (Jezebel's father) as a king-priest who ruled over Tyre and Sidon for thirty-two years. His daughter, a daughter of hell, made Baal-worship official in Israel and appointed priests to Baal, her god. It was even probable that Ahab participated in the worship of Baal at the time of his marriage.

Ahab, through the influence of Jezebel, not only built an altar to Baal, but placed this altar in a temple built in Samaria and dedicated it to Baal, just as Solomon had built a Temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. Now a rival altar and an opposing temple were established in the territory of Israel to defy the altar and the temple in Judah. The ten tribes of the north and the two tribes in the south had once been formed as one whole nation of Israel. Satan apparently had been successful in setting up his throne next to God's Throne among the people of Israel. Jeroboam could not even have dreamt of being so blatant and flagrant. What Jeroboam began as an imitation under the Name of Jehovah, Ahab completed as a defiance under the name of Baal. Asherah poles, a female-counterpart goddess to Baal, were erected in every corner of Israel. These offensive idols were just a reflection of what had taken place in the hearts of the people of Israel through their bowing down to the wrong altars. How detestable! How sad!

## The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom

Satan wanted to imitate God in every way. He wanted a capital city for the northern kingdom. Samaria, which was purchased by Ahab's father, was only seven miles northwest of Shechem, where Joshua had assembled all the tribes of Israel to a renewal of the covenant instituted by Moses (Deut. 11:26-30; 27:1-7). It was **Joshua's final official act** as the servant of the Lord and as the mediator of the Lord's sovereignty over His kingdom people. He followed in the footsteps of **Moses whose final official act** was also to remind the people of Israel of the terms and conditions of God's covenant with them as their God and their King.

### The Testimony of Moses' Final Commandment

How faithful are the Lord's servants to keep reminding His people of God's Kingdom:

*“Then Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: ‘Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which **the Lord your God is giving you**, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter **the land which the Lord your God is giving you**, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you. Therefore, it shall be when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I commanded you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an **altar** to the Lord your God, an **altar of stones**’”* (Deut. 27:1-7).

By building an altar to the Lord their God, they were declaring His Kingdom and His right of rulership over the land of promise.

### The Testimony of Joshua's Final Challenge

Joshua did the same thing at Shechem. As a faithful servant of the Lord, he called all twelve tribes of Israel together for a renewal of this



## Breaking the Silence

covenant just before he departed from the scene of Israel's history. He reminded them of their history, starting from Terah, Abraham's father. He recounted all they had gone through, including the captivity in Egypt, the exodus, the years in the desert, the entry into Canaan, and the conquests in possessing the Land. Joshua concluded with the following words:

*"I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.*

*Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and **put away the gods which your fathers served** on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve**, whether **the gods which your fathers served** that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. **But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**"*

Here, at this juncture, Joshua took the stand of the remnant.

*"So the people answered and said: 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, Who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.'*

*But Joshua said ... 'You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and **serve foreign gods**, then He will turn ... harm ... consume you, after He has done you good.'*

*And the people said to Joshua, 'No, but we will serve the Lord!'*

*So Joshua said, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him.'*

*And they said, 'We are witnesses.'*

## The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom

*'Now therefore,' he said, 'put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel'*" (Josh.24:13-23).

What a discerning man! Deep down in his heart Joshua knew the ingenuousness and gullibility of these people. He knew how prone they were to bowing before foreign gods and serving them. Their history showed it, and Joshua's experience with them attested to it. Did you notice this quotation from his discourse — "*put away the gods which your fathers served*"? It betrayed their 'lip service' to the Lord, because they were still holding on to the idols their forefathers worshiped as far back as Abraham's time — well over 800 years!

In the statement — "*And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*" — Joshua shows he knew how much the people of Israel **disliked** worshiping Jehovah. They had more fun with other gods, who allowed them all sorts of freedom and who granted them permission to commit all sorts of immorality.

How deceitful can the human heart be! How pretentious God's people can become! When they still had their fathers' idols in their possession, they said, "*Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods....*" Joshua, seeing the hypocrisy of the people and trying to forewarn them about the incalculable amount of future troubles, said:

*"You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God.... He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."*

Years in advance, Joshua could see the evidence of a sinful heart in these people. He was warning them against forsaking God. But the people with one voice said, "*We will serve the Lord!*" So Joshua replied, "*You are witnesses against yourselves....*" This word "*against*" could only be true if the people turned to other gods. It was in fact Joshua's prophecy to the people of Israel. It was as though Joshua were telling them that they

## Breaking the Silence

would undoubtedly vacillate and become idolatrous, and that their testimonies at Shechem would be used against them.

However, the people were very insistent. Joshua, trying to help them see the emptiness of their promise and the deceitfulness of their hearts, finally said, “*Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are among you.*” What Joshua was telling them was that they, like Achan, had **already** made this same covenant with God through Moses, **yet they still had idols in their possessions!**

Nevertheless, Joshua went through the motions of renewing their covenant with God. Thus, the Word makes this record:

*“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in **Shechem**”* (Josh. 24:25).

### The Testimony of Shechem’s Memorable Covenant

Considerable portions of Scripture are dedicated to explaining what went on at **Shechem**, a place where the people of Israel renewed their covenant with God, promising not to forsake Him for other gods and covenanting to serve Him only.

Now less than 700 years later, in the city of Samaria located only seven miles northwest of Shechem, the people of Israel declared a kingdom, which officially worshiped Baal. Thus, they made a mockery of the covenant they had ratified at Shechem. They failed to remember Joshua’s warnings about the consequences of their actions. **Shechem** stood as a testimony **against** the people of Israel. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, stood only seven miles northwest of Shechem and 300 feet above the surrounding fertile valleys. It provided an ideal location for a nearly impregnable capital city for Israel. By establishing this city, the kings of the northern kingdom could possess a royal city comparable to that of Jerusalem, the city of David’s royal dynasty. In opposition to Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom designated Samaria as its capital city.

## The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom

### The Testimony of Jericho's Ruined Walls

*“In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the Word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun”* (I Kings 16:34, NIV)

We may wonder why this incident is recorded in the Bible. It might seem very insignificant. For one thing, Jericho was not uninhabitable — it was just an unwalled city. All Hiel did was to rebuild its walls and gates. His act, however, was significant enough to be recorded in the Word of God, because the building of the walls was in direct rebellion against God's Word spoken to Joshua. The ruins of Jericho were to remain as a constant memorial to the people of Israel, reminding them that they had received the land of Canaan from God as an inheritance and a gift of grace. The ruins of Jericho were to be a monument of their first victory in the land of promise. The fallen walls of Jericho were to be a perpetual reminder to the people of Israel that it was not through their own might and power that they conquered Jericho, but through the sovereign intervention of Jehovah on their behalf. The fallen walls of Jericho testified that Satan's kingdom had been brought down and toppled in Canaan.

Rebuilding the walls of Jericho was in defiance to God's command and a denial of His Sovereignty and divine rights over Israel. Jericho's reconstructed walls meant that Satan's kingdom was being re-established in the land of Canaan.

Even the memory of Jehovah Himself was being erased from the history of the Israelites in the northern kingdom. It did not matter at what cost or at what waste of life, so long as Satan could claim absolute mastery and rulership over Israel.

It does not seem like these are the same people to whom Jehovah had made this wonderful promise after bringing them out of Egypt —

## Breaking the Silence

*“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Ex. 19:5-6).

Once in the trap of Satan, the people went from bad to worse. Evil had become progressively worse in the royal house of the northern kingdom located at Samaria. During Ahab’s era, the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan especially intensified. The kingdom of Satan was represented by the wicked king Ahab and the blood-thirsty queen Jezebel, a heathen daughter of the idol-worshipping king Ethbaal.

Every genuine item in the Kingdom of God had its counterfeit. Note the following instances: 1) Samaria stood as a counterfeit against Jerusalem. 2) The temple of Baal stood against the Temple of the Lord. 3) The altar of Baal against the Altar of the Lord. 4) The priests of Baal against the Levites. All seemed well on Satan’s part. He apparently had accomplished what he wanted. He had established his kingdom among the majority of God’s people.

Now who could stand against such a powerful kingdom and challenge it? Where was God’s faithful remnant? Could anyone ever challenge this wicked system of idolatry? Ahab’s era was the ultimate of Satan’s achievement among the people of Israel. Against such an evil world, only an equally devoted remnant could stand.

But the same question remains for us today. We live in an era that is ecclesiastically identical to Ahab’s times. The Church of God is infiltrated with Jeroboamic as well as Ahabic altars. Who can challenge the idolatrous imitations of the church of today — imitations that are counterfeit and a mockery of the Lord’s sovereign reality? They represent everything but the true Church of God. They declare everything but what is of the Kingdom of God. As it was in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, so also it is today. The majority of Christianity is in the domain of Satan’s rulership. But where is the faithful remnant standing up, shouting in the face of this corrupt system, and calling it by its true name — *“The Great*

## The Menacing Rivalry of Satan's Kingdom

*Prostitute*” (Rev. 17:1)? It is not coincidental that our Lord in the book of Revelation points to a “*Jezebel*” in the church (Rev. 2:20).

As we continue, we will see the influence of this evil couple, Ahab and Jezebel, over God’s people. But we also discover the powerful remnant of God, who stood in the face of this powerful idolatrous system. Not only did they challenge it, but also demonstrated and declared God’s sovereign Kingdom. May the Lord grant us the strength of the same vision.

# 10

## A Call for the Kingdom

The stage is now set. The counterfeit kingdom has fortified itself. Satan has placed Ahab and Jezebel on the throne of the northern kingdom. Samaria, with its temple of Baal poised against the Temple of God, had replaced Jerusalem as a worship center for the ten northern tribes of Israel. Baal's altar was consuming sacrifices — even children — offered by God's people. The priests of Baal, who were very well taken care of by Jezebel, stood before the altars of Baal on behalf of Israel.

### Elijah — a Kingdom Representative

Israel was in such a deplorable condition when God called a prophet to stand on His behalf. The Lord summoned a representative from among His people — one who saw spiritually the epidemic failures throughout Israel. Because of people's common ties, natural affections, personal gains, political pursuits, and national interests, the spiritual corruption in Israel became widespread. However, the faithful remnant in Judah continued to declare God's Kingdom by worshiping at the Lord's altar at Jerusalem. The time had come for God to call a prophet, Elijah, who would be both His and the remnant's representative in Israel. God is faithful, and He will not send a representative of His remnant empty-

## **Breaking the Silence**

handed and powerless into the battlefield to confront an enemy as powerful as Ahab and Jezebel — the representatives of Satan and his kingdom.

Just as in the case of Noah, who received the construction plan for the ark, or as in the case of Moses, who was equipped with a rod, so Elijah was a remnant prophet clothed with power from on High. The display of power by miracles and wonders through Elijah was a phenomenon of God's kingdom rule. They were not given to him for self-glorification or for any other self-seeking reasons. It was not necessary for Elijah to resort to soulish psychology to obtain gifts and power; the power was available in the kingdom. When someone lives within the realm of God's kingdom, power is spontaneously operative and constantly available. But the Church-at-large today has completely disregarded and ignored this truth of the kingdom.

Jesus did not promise the Holy Spirit and His power for the “electronic church”, where television performers can dramatize their glamorous powers before the Christian public and entertain them all day long. Nor did He promise such power to evangelists in order for them to make a business out of it. We do not deny the limited usefulness of such situations, but let us go back to our Bibles, seek God's mind, and know His will and purpose. Then we will come to realize what the ministry of the Church is, why the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early disciples, and why the Church needed the power of the Holy Spirit. Be it main line or other denominational churches, nearly all have missed this crucial point. The message of the Bible from beginning to end is about the Kingdom of God and its many ramifications.

## **Matthew — a Kingdom Gospel**

We know the New Testament is about the person of and the events in the life of Jesus, who is the incarnate Son of God, who came into this world as Savior to die for the sins of fallen humanity. The New Testament



## A Call for the Kingdom

opens with the Gospel of Matthew. And it is in this Gospel that Jesus is first introduced as King. In fact, the very first words of the Gospel refer to the kingly genealogy of Jesus.

The first remnant of the New Testament is found in this Gospel, namely, John the Baptist, whose message was simple, clear, and remnant-oriented: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:2 NKJV).

The first message preached by our Lord Jesus, the message of the kingdom, is found in this Gospel: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 4:17 NKJV).

The Gospel of Matthew gives details about the Lord’s repeated miracles and healings in Chapters 8 and 9: “*And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel [good news] of the kingdom of God, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people*” (Matt. 9:35 NKJV). Matthew describes healing as incidental to the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. Everything is for God’s kingdom.

According to Matthew, Jesus communicated the kingdom as a central idea to His disciples: “*And as you go, preach saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the leper, raise the dead, cast out demons....*” (Matt. 10:7-8 NKJV).

Once again, healing and miracles accompanied the message of the kingdom. Salvation was not yet mentioned. Blood had not yet been shed. Atonement had not yet been provided. The kingdom was the only message preached and the only power demonstrated.

It is in this Gospel that John the Baptist, after being put in jail, sends messengers to Jesus asking for a confirmation of His kingship. Jesus responded: “*Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them*” (Matt. 11:4-5 NKJV).

## Breaking the Silence

The good news, as Jesus preached it, was not merely the gospel of salvation, but the gospel of the kingdom, which includes the good news of salvation. And this news was also demonstrated in power.

Again, it is in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees about the source of His power to heal the sick and cast out demons. He revealed the source of His power very clearly: *“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you”* (Matt. 12:28 NKJV). This verse states in plain and simple language that the Spirit of God is connected to and identified with the kingdom of God, and that healing is the natural effect of the power available within the domain of God’s kingdom.

As a result of this verse, the following words are instructive and become the subject of numerous interpretations: *“Therefore, I [Jesus] say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come”* (Matt. 12:31-32 NKJV).

In verse 28, Jesus was associating the manifestation of the Holy Spirit with the kingdom of God. And previously we saw, as in the case of Jeroboam, a voluntary rejection of the kingdom of God. This is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and leads to extremely severe consequences. For example, Satan, in a desire to establish his own kingdom, **purposely and willfully** refused and rejected God’s kingdom. Thus, he became guilty of blasphemy. However, Adam and Eve were **deceived** into rejecting God’s kingdom; they therefore are not guilty of blasphemy. Jeroboam committed this sin of willful rejection of God’s kingdom by a deliberate bowing down to Satan as his god. This was a direct blasphemy against the Holy Spirit Whose objective is that of establishing God’s kingdom.

In previous chapters, we compared David and Jeroboam’s sin. Although David’s sins seemed worse on the surface, he never willfully

## A Call for the Kingdom

rejected God's kingdom. Whereas Jeroboam subtly erected a counterfeit altar, which declared the coming of another kingdom in Israel. Eventually, his blasphemous altar developed into Baal's altar and temple in Ahab's time.

Again, in the Gospel of Matthew we read the words of our Lord regarding a simulated and altered appearance of the kingdom — a depiction of today's Christendom — portrayed in His parables of chapter 13.

Matthew is the first to mention the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (Matt. 14:13-21), which again exhibited a powerful kingdom phenomenon.

Also, our Lord's transfiguration, which gives us a glimpse into His visible appearance and glorious manifestation in the coming kingdom, is described by Matthew (Matt. 17:1-2). The power of the Spirit over matter is spectacularly demonstrated in this event.

In this Gospel, Jesus makes reference to Elijah on several occasions (Matt. 11:14; 16:14; 17:3-4,10-12; 27:47,49). And Elijah is the subject of our immediate study. As we will see, he stood "remnant-tough" against Ahab and Jezebel in his declaration of God's kingdom.

The Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the King in the kingdom of heaven is also spotlighted in this Gospel (Matt. 21:1-11). This fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy, which says: "*Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your King is coming to you*" (Zech. 9:9 NKJV).

The Gospel of Matthew profiles Jesus as the King of the Jews. When Pilate asked Jesus if He was King of the Jews, He replied, "*It is as you say*" (Matt. 27:11 NKJV). And the inscription on the cross declared, "*This is Jesus the King of the Jews*" (Matt. 27:37 NKJV).

## Christianity — a "Kingdomless" Religion

Popular Christianity at best preaches the gospel of salvation, but not the gospel of the kingdom. It is in the business of saving sinners from hell

## Breaking the Silence

and sending them to heaven, but this is only a half-gospel. The full-gospel incorporates the gospel of the kingdom of God as well. The gospel of salvation opens the door to the kingdom of God and makes it possible for sinners to become its citizens. Actually, the ultimate purpose of Christianity is not salvation, but the kingdom. The battle and conflict between God and Satan from the beginning has been over the kingdom and its subjects. The process of saving sinners without introducing them and leading them into the realm of the kingdom life defeats the purpose of salvation. Salvation was meant to usher saved people triumphantly into the kingdom of God.

Moreover, salvation is individual; the kingdom is corporate. Individuals, who are saved from the domain of Satan, sin, and death, should also be guided to be saved from their individualism (not their individuality). The domain of the kingdom is collective in nature and should be manifested corporately in the Church.

The gospel of salvation as preached today is a “cheap gospel” of saving sinners from hell and selling them “fire insurance.” Where is the gospel of the kingdom? Healing, miracles, and wonders have become Christian entertainment on television. In a self-centered Christianity, that is about all anyone can expect.

Signs, wonders, and miracles were the standard criterion for the Old Testament remnant, who stood faithfully in the sphere of the kingdom. The power they experienced was the norm for the remnant, because they, on one hand, refused to bow to the altars of Jeroboam, Ahab, and Jezebel, and on the other hand, declared the Lord’s kingdom. Those who stood on the ground of the remnant were equipped for the ministry the Lord had entrusted to them.

# 11

## The Church Versus the World

### The True Objective of the Church

Jesus came to re-establish God's kingdom, because it had been at stake for thousands of years. Mankind, who was originally created to represent God's kingdom, had failed. Now God's new Man, the Person of Jesus Christ, was needed to begin anew the redemption of the Adamic man.

Let us stop to think about our purpose in Christianity and our relationship to God's kingdom. What is the objective of our Christianity? What is the direction of our preaching? Some base their objective on certain passages of the New Testament other than the kingdom. Others preach a message other than the kingdom.

For example, some may quote this verse, "*And repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47 NKJV). Mark the word "*repentance.*" The very first mention of this word in the New Testament is in relation to the kingdom. It becomes therefore obvious that "*repentance and the remission of sins*" are matters related to God's kingdom.

Take another example. Our Lord, when giving the promise of the Holy Spirit to His disciples, said: "*Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but you tarry in Jerusalem until you are endued with power*

## Breaking the Silence

*from above*” (Luke 24:49 NKJV). To be endued with power from above is for what purpose? For performing miracles, healing, speaking in tongues, interpreting, prophesying, etc.?

The answer is given by the same author in Acts: “*Until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through **the Holy Spirit** to the Apostles He had chosen. After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave them many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about **the kingdom of God***” (Acts 1:2-3).

In His post-resurrection appearances, Jesus did not teach His disciples how to perform marriages, conduct funerals, or baptize infants. But these sacraments have become the only ministry of some churches, with the gospel on the side. But that is not the true purpose of the Church.

As the book of Acts closes, we get a glimpse into the last days of the life and message of the Apostle Paul. While he was under house arrest in Rome, this is what he taught the Jews who came to hear him:

*“They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them **the kingdom of God**...*

*‘Therefore I want you to know that **God’s salvation** has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen....’*

*For two whole years Paul stayed in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance, he preached **the kingdom of God** and taught about **the Lord Jesus Christ**”* (Acts 28:23, 28, 30-31 NIV).

Notice the words “*God’s salvation,*” “*the kingdom of God,*” and “*the Lord Jesus Christ.*” These phrases in this context indicate the relationship between salvation, kingdom, and Christ. **God’s salvation**, wrought by our **Lord Jesus Christ** on the cross of Calvary, was for the purpose of **God’s kingdom**. Paul was preaching the message of the kingdom of God in a city where Caesar had his throne and altar. But this faithful remnant preached

## The Church Versus the World

God's kingdom and Jesus as King. Why then has the Church today lost its direction and message?

It is simply because what happened to Israel has also happened to the Church. First, the counterfeit altars and feasts of Jeroboam were brought in, which eventually led to Samaria, an idolatrous stronghold for Baal's temple, Baal's altar, and Baal's priests. The same succession of events characterizes the Church today.

However, God is by no means defeated. He has His remnant whom He knows, marks, and constantly keeps before His eyes. He has His special people who are identified with Him and who are not ashamed to declare His kingdom, as Paul has said it beautifully: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...*" (Rom. 1:16 NKJV). When Paul speaks about "*the gospel of Christ,*" he has in view not only salvation, but also the kingdom.

Two of the most conclusive verses which combine salvation with the kingdom are found in the Gospel of John. Through His discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus plainly said: "*Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Most assuredly ... unless one is born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3,5). Very conclusively, we see that regeneration and salvation are directly related to God's kingdom. Unfortunately, the word "kingdom" has been so spiritualized nowadays that the church of God, who is supposed to preach and demonstrate it, fails to see the relationship between salvation and the kingdom.

## The Challenge of the One True Church

The Church today is relegated as being an organization responsible for certain religious ceremonies, such as marriages and funerals. It encompasses mostly old people, who are coming to the end of their days and want to do some good works to get on the good side of God. It is seen

## Breaking the Silence

as an organization which institutes a moral code of behavior and does charitable work.

The contemporary Church has been rendered completely useless and impotent. It is no longer separate as **the** society, but has integrated itself into the world's social structure in which it exists. It has lost the vision and the courage to stand up and declare that only the Church, nothing but the Church, is the true society; everything else is a counterfeit and belongs to the kingdom of Satan.

The Church is not the non-conforming revolutionary entity that once challenged Caesar's kingdom. Instead, it has become part of Caesar's kingdom, trying to improve it. If there were radio and television in Caesar's days, the main news would probably have been about the conflict between the Christians and the Roman Empire. The true Church is completely absent from the news today. What happened to the true Church who used to stand against false kingdoms declaring, "There is one King, the Lord Jesus, and there is one kingdom as represented by the one true Church"?

### A Benign Good World and a Malign Bad World

Sadly, we have divided Satan's world into two categories: a benign world and a malign world. We have divided the world into good and evil, just like Adam and Eve were made to believe. After thousands of years of God's direct and indirect revelations, we are back to square one. To us, there is a good world and a bad world. But according to the Word of God, the whole world is evil and lies in the bosom of the evil one (I John 5:19). We have forgotten that we, as the Church was supposed to be, are the alternative society, opposed to all that is of the world. When John and James referred to the world, they did not categorize it into capitalism, democracy, communism, and the such, considering parts of it good and other parts of it bad. They just called **all** of it evil.



## The Church Versus the World

James says: “*Adulterers and adulteresses! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world, makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

John also takes up the same theme: “*Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (I John 2:15 NKJV). There is no such thing as dividing the world into categories. John is emphatic when he says: “***We know that we are of God and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one***” (I John 5:19).

## The Alternative to the World

I do not condemn any particular group or any denomination. I do not disassociate myself from the rest of my brothers and sisters in Christ. All I want to say is that the whole Church of God has deviated from the truth which it is supposed to preach and uphold. I want to call everyone’s attention to the fact that our ranks have been infiltrated. Jeroboams, Ahab, and Jezebels have taken over and erected altars which are not the Lord’s. God’s people have bowed down to them and made themselves slaves to Satan. I invite Christian brothers and sisters to stand up with me on the ground of the remnant, to uphold and declare God’s kingdom, and to expose the contaminating evil which has crept in, like leaven in dough. We are not, and must never be, a part of the present religious system of this world.

Let us wake up. We are not here to put things right, but to be the alternative to this corrupt world. The Church has given in to the enemy, just like Israel had given in to Ahab and Jezebel. It was when everything looked absolutely hopeless, as it is today, that Satan, through Ahab and Jezebel, had established his throne in Israel. Then God called a remnant represented by Elijah, to stand up for Him, declare His Kingdom, and defy Satan and his puppets.

Sometimes it seems that the Old Testament believers had a better understanding of what was at stake than we who claim to have the full

## **Breaking the Silence**

revelation of God given to us through recorded Scriptures. Elijah was fully aware of the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. He also knew the odds very well. Yet, he chose not to bow down to Baal, stood on the ground of God's remnant, and declared God's kingdom. Even today God wants His remnant to stand up for Him as Elijah did in his time.

Let us all, as Christian brothers and sisters, stand up and together resist the Jeroboams, the Ahabs, and the Jezebels of Christianity. Then, as we will see in the case of Elijah, God will honor His remnant and stand beside them for His own glory.

# 12

## Preparing the Remnant

Now we will look at an outstanding Prophet, whose life represents the principle of the remnant. God prepared this man to take a stand and declare the kingdom of God. From a natural, logical viewpoint, the prospect of taking such a stand was menacing, but from God's perspective, it deserved applause. Let us observe several essential traits in Elijah's life that characterize the remnant:

### 1. Stand before the Living God

*“Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word’ ”* (I Kings 17:1 NKJV).

Elijah lives up to the meaning of his name: **‘The Lord is my God.’** He stands before the idolatrous king of the land and says, *“...as the Lord God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand....”* First, he testifies that **the Lord**, not Baal, is the God of Israel. Second, he testifies that the Lord **lives**. In other words, the Lord is a living God, and Baal a dead god. Third, he makes his own **position** clear by saying, *“before Whom I stand.”* Elijah, using terminology well known to Ahab, designates his position as a person standing in the service of the Lord, his true sovereign.

## Breaking the Silence

In order to receive God's covenanted blessings, Israel was supposed to anoint kings and priests to serve as official representatives of the Lord, their true King, and to lead them in the way of faithfulness to the Lord. Since the days of Jeroboam, however, the northern kingdom had not had such a priest, and all of its kings had been unfaithful, walking in the sinful and idolatrous ways of Jeroboam. Eventually, Ahab and Jezebel had caused a great national crisis by promoting Baal worship. At that time, by sovereign intervention, God sent Elijah as His remnant representative to stand and serve before the Lord Himself.

In other words, Elijah tells Ahab, "I serve the Lord Who is the great King of Israel, the living God of Israel — not like you who stand before Baal, a dead idol." Is Elijah being presumptuous? No, of course not. He is called upon to act realistically for God in a degenerate age. He has to make an effort to bring his people back to God and His Kingdom. He is acting on the principle of the remnant, knowing that a remnant will always be endowed with power. He knows that in their past, Noah had been equipped with the ark, and Moses had been armed with a rod. Now Elijah is endowed with the power of the spoken Word of God. He is armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with Israel. The words, "*as the Lord God of Israel lives, before Whom I stand*" are very significant and powerful, meaning that as long as he stands before "*the Lord God of Israel,*" he is connected with the power to speak with authority.

## 2. Identify Yourself with the Lord in Prayer

Ahab only sees Elijah speaking and claiming his stand before the Lord God of Israel. He is not aware of the long hours that Elijah, in his solitude, had knelt before the living God — long before presenting himself to Ahab and Israel. If we, as the Lord's remnant, are prepared in this way, we will not be affected by what people can say about us or what they can do to us when we present ourselves to the world on behalf of God. Neither was the Lord Jesus affected by human concepts or opinions. How we need to

## Preparing the Remnant

identify ourselves with our Lord! How we need to stand before Him and serve Him before we are able to present ourselves to the Ahabs of today! It is only then that we will be able to stand up like Elijah and say, *“There shall not be dew nor rain these years **except at my word.**”*

Elijah identified himself with the Lord completely. His words were God’s words. The words of the remnant are God’s words. James, in his epistle, reminds us of the reason behind Elijah’s power:

*“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months**”* (James 5:17 NKJV).

Here the key phrase is *“prayed earnestly.”* Oh, that we would learn how to pray! We, who want to stand before the Lord and present ourselves to the world, should learn to pray earnestly in tune with God’s will, like Elijah. Then we will be able to say *“except at my word.”* Often, however, we are deceived by formal prayers, prayers which have no reality in them. They are mostly based on **our** needs and are in tune with **our** own will. True prayer is the outflow of the Spirit within us, not a mere superstitious utterance of what we think we should do by force of habit.

*“There shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word.”* What is the reason behind such a forceful statement? As a representative of the remnant of God’s people, Elijah had taken it upon himself to challenge Baal in the very attribute for which he was being worshiped: Baal was a god of fertility and the lord of the rain clouds. Thus, Elijah’s pronouncement struck at the heart of Baal’s power. God, through Elijah, was not only challenging Baal, but also punishing a nation who had become idolatrous, a nation who had forsaken the living God for a dead idol. Elijah was raised up to show Israel how badly they had fallen.

The true church of God should also stand up in the face of a corrupted, idolatrous, and religious system, which encompasses the likes of Ahab and Jezebel. This well-organized system will certainly become irate and, through its alliance inherent in its world order, will mobilize all its forces, power, and propaganda machinery to try and destroy God’s true remnant

## Breaking the Silence

who refuses to bow to its phony altars and impotent gods. For fear of such a reaction, the pulpits of many churches nowadays preach and advocate self-promoting morality, secular humanism, and more fashionably, the power of positive thinking, rather than “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (I Cor. 2:2).

Churches have given in by bowing before the kingdoms of this world, rather than proclaiming the kingdom of God. They are famished and are groping for the true Word of God, just as Israel did under Ahab, but to no avail. They work out their learned speeches, write pedantic outlines, and are well schooled by their seminaries and Bible schools. But they are void of power, not able to say “*thus says the Lord*” or “*except at my word.*” They dare not make any such claims, because they know **He** has not spoken. But Elijah, standing on the ground of God’s remnant and identifying himself with Him, could say, “*There shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.*”

### 3. Learn to Refuse the Glory of the Flesh

After pronouncing a temporary judgment on Israel and challenging Baal on the very grounds by which he was worshiped, Elijah was ordered back into obscurity and further training.

“*Then the Word of the Lord came to him saying, ‘Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into Jordan.’*” (I Kings: 17:2-3 NKJV).

Our popularity should not elate us, nor should our obscurity deflate us. There is a time for the remnant to stand up and proclaim the Word of God, and there is also a time for them to return into the fellowship of their God, far from all the hustle and bustle of daily activity and religious entanglements.

There is an interim period for the remnant between pronouncing judgment on an anti-God establishment and proclaiming God’s kingdom in demonstration and power. This interim period is for further training. It

## Preparing the Remnant

is a time in which God reveals Himself to His remnant in deeper ways never known before. It prepares them and reinforces their faith to face an even fiercer confrontation.

In this interim period of three years and six months when Israel was going through a drought, Elijah was becoming more and more familiar with **the living God** and learning to refuse his flesh. We are all so prone to make our service, our knowledge of God, our revelations, and our presentations of the truth of God a pedestal on which to flaunt and flare our own glory. But this cannot be allowed in the life of the remnant.

Revelations and obscurity go hand in hand to keep the flesh under control. The remnant is provided with every opportunity to deal with the flesh before encountering the real and present danger, lest the devil make use of the flesh in the middle of the battle.

It is important for the remnant to be separated from any religious hierarchy, and in no way have any identity with an ecclesiastical society. In religious situations like this, the Lord shows how much He opposes the religionists and their religions. The Lord chooses ways and means that are opposed to all that is conventional, formal, and traditional.

### 4. Rely on the Promise of God's Providence

Thus, Elijah was ordered into obscurity for further training and important lessons. One of the lessons he had to learn was about God's providence for His remnant. God was going to provide for Elijah regardless of how degenerate and corrupt the prevailing conditions had become.

*“The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, ‘Get away from here and turn eastward and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into Jordan ... you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there’”* (I Kings 17:2-4 NKJV).

God meets the needs of the remnant. If they remain faithful to their call of proclaiming the word of the kingdom of God, they should not worry

## Breaking the Silence

about their day to day needs. Is not this what our Lord told us when He was laying down the principles of the kingdom in Matthew 5 to 7 ?

*“Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air.... Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat ... drink ... or wear?’ For after all these things the gentiles [nations] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”* (Matt.6:25-32 NKJV).

These verses beautifully show us the providence of God, our Father. But do they apply to everyone, including every self-centered, self-sufficient Christian? Could they be claimed by those who make **self** the king of their life and bow before the altars of this world’s economy? The subsequent verse gives us the answer:

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matt. 6:33 NKJV).

The promise of God’s providence is to those who, above all else, “*seek first*” His kingdom and His righteousness. The promise is to the faithful remnant who continues to preach and proclaim the word of the kingdom.

While drought and famine persisted in the land, God commanded the brook Cherith to flow and ravens to provide food for Elijah — two most unlikely events. How could a dry brook flow in the heat of a drought? How could scavengers act contrary to nature and provide food in a famine?

### 5. Obey by Abolishing your Religious Background

Even stranger was the fact that ravens had been explicitly pronounced unclean by God Himself in His dietary laws given to Moses (Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14). We saw earlier that “the mark of the remnant is not perfection, but non-conformity.” Here we see Elijah, **not perfect** with regards to the righteousness which comes by God’s dietary laws, **but non-conforming** to the idolatry at Ahab’s altars.



## Preparing the Remnant

God commanded and Elijah obeyed. In this whole passage, we do not detect the slightest hint that Elijah had questioned the Lord's command and His providence. Somehow, this incident reminds us of Peter in complete contrast when he was on the house-top in Joppa. He had a vision of a sheet coming down to him from heaven, at which time the Lord commanded him in Acts 10:13-15:

*“And a voice came to him, ‘Arise, Peter, kill and eat!’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean.’ And again a voice came to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no longer consider common.’”*

Peter was about to be taken to a gentile officer's house. He was going to be instrumental in opening the door to the kingdom of God for this gentile officer and to all gentiles after him. The Lord Jesus had entrusted the keys of the kingdom of God to Peter (Matt. 16:19), but just as he was about to use one of these keys, his religious background came to stand in the way. The Lord had to deal with Peter's religiosity before he could concede to cooperate.

Peter had walked with Jesus for three and half years and had surely been with Jesus when a dispute over the traditional washing of hands had arisen. In response, Jesus had replied, *“Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth. This defiles a man”* (Matt. 15:11 NKJV).

Peter was on the side of Jesus then. Why the disobedience and the argument now? Because there was still some religion in him. Even when he seemed to have obeyed, the religion in Peter was not completely cleansed. Later, his confrontation with the Apostle Paul shows us that Peter still had some religion left in him (Gal. 2:11-21 NKJV).

On the other hand, Elijah, this blessed remnant man, did not question the Lord. He just obeyed. He knew that what was at stake was greater than religion and any of its dietary rules. Thus, he passed a severe test, and as a result of his obedience to God's command, he witnessed the miraculous ways in which the Lord provided for His remnant.

## Breaking the Silence

### 6. Take Time to Receive Further Light

While Israel was in the promised land starving, its king and prophet, as we will later see, were searching the scorched deserts for grass to feed their animals. Elijah, however, was fed by God Himself through the most unlikely means. Israel was relying on Baal and starving. Elijah, Jehovah's servant and representative according to the principle of the remnant, was being taken care of by God Himself. By studying further the life of this man of God, we come to see how the Lord reveals more and more of Himself to His servants in circumstances that men may consider impossible.

Elijah came from the mountains of Gilead with a message from the God of Israel to the so-called king of Israel. He is now called back into the solitude of prayer and into God's Presence, where he will receive further training and further revelations of God's character. God uses those to whom He has revealed Himself, such as Moses on the Mount of God, Aaron in the Holy of holies, John on the island of Patmos, and now Elijah at the brook Cherith and later in Zarephath.

The best example of all is the Lord Jesus Himself. As soon as He was baptized and called to the ministry of the kingdom, "*He was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*" (Matt. 4:1). For forty days He was tempted by the devil in many areas, including the area of eating and drinking. But He overcame the tempter by the spoken Word of God. Luke records the following: "*Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit*" (Luke 4:14). It was in temptations and trials that **the leading** of the Spirit became **the power** of the Spirit to equip Him for the message He had to preach. Matthew tells us what happened afterward:

*"From that time Jesus began to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of the heaven is at hand'"* (Matt. 4:17 NKJV).

# 13

## Knowing the Character of God

God's chosen remnant may not be very visible and prominent, but they are always being prepared and trained for a final showdown. So was the case with Elijah whose knowledge of God had to be enlarged through a test of faith. Each step he took brought him into a deeper knowledge of God, which in turn led him to a greater exercise of faith. In line with this stage of his life, we come across another change in Elijah's circumstances.

### The Lessons of Faith in God's Providence

*"And it happened after a while that the brook [Cherith] dried up" (1 Kings 17:7 NKJV).*

When all is well and favorable, we think our faith is strong. Faith, however, never looks at circumstances, but always beyond them, straight at God. God arranges our circumstances for our real training, so that we may have the opportunity to grow and exercise our faith for greater tests and challenges to come. Before standing face to face with the kingdom of Satan, the brooks at our "Cherith" will dry up. The previous resources of our Christian background will dry up so that we can be filled with something new. God is always training those who trust Him and submit to

## Breaking the Silence

His discipline, because He has called us for a great work according to His purpose. But the dry brook is not the end:

*“Then the Word of the Lord came to him, ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See **I have commanded** a widow there to provide for you’”* (1 Kings 17:8-9 NKJV).

Our faith should not depend on circumstances, but on the sure foundation that God *“has commanded”* that the remnant be taken care of. He might use the most unlikely means, but what matters is God *“has commanded.”* In all of the circumstances ordered by God, Elijah had to learn the lesson of God’s providence and omnipotence; otherwise, later he would not be able to stand before a famine-stricken people and say *“if the Lord be God, follow Him.”* How can we possibly declare God as King of all our needs if His sovereign rule has not come into our own lives? If we, as citizens of His kingdom, cannot depend on Him in all the circumstances of our lives, how can we convince others to do so?

Elijah was taught two great lessons: That God was sovereign over material matter, and that God was sovereign over human life. Once again, Elijah obeyed the Lord. Subsequently, he was placed in circumstances by which he could both advance his knowledge and deepen his experience of God.

*“So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gates of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.’ And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’*

*Then she said, ‘As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar, and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die’”* (1 Kings 17:10-12 NKJV).

Here was a woman about to die of hunger. Had God made a mistake in choosing her to feed Elijah? What an unlikely person to tend to God’s prophet! Our natural response is one of disbelief. Why not select a wealthy

## Knowing the Character of God

person so as not to torment this poor woman and her son who were about to die? Because the abundance of a rich believer would not have glorified and vindicated God Who was about to feed a famine-stricken Israel. Rather, the poverty of this destitute widow proved that God was not only sovereign over man's spirit, but also over every circumstantial thing around him. He was the omnipotent God Who could feed a starving nation.

Elijah was about to proclaim such a divine King and such a blessed Kingdom to an impoverished Israel. But before he could do so, he had to see it for himself. He had to receive a revelation of that particular attribute of God. Then he could preach the providence of God to Israel as the only alternative to Baal. This message was to even reach King Ahab who, under the famishing dominion of Baal, was also searching for grass to feed his horses and mules. Israel, in their desperation, needed to return to Jehovah Who could meet all their needs.

Elijah, despite the apparent circumstances in which he found himself, did not doubt God Who had said, "***I have commanded** a widow there to provide for you.*" He could have resorted to other means and sources to satisfy his hunger and thirst. By so doing, he would have missed one of the greatest lessons of faith that he could ever learn — the enjoyment of God's providence. He knew God was God. And what he was about to witness was God in action, a demonstration of the sovereign God of Israel, the One Whom Israel had forsaken for Baal. As he submitted to each further step of knowing God, his faith grew stronger and stronger for a tremendous task. Elijah did not fix his eyes on the widow or her limited resources, but on the God Who could create something out of nothing. Praise the Lord! Elijah did not fall victim to his circumstances. But desiring to **know God** for a newer revelation and a stronger faith, he said:

*"Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth'"* (I Kings 17:13-14).

## Breaking the Silence

The language of faith is *“Thus says the Lord.”* The moment we lay hold of God’s promises, it is the end of the reasonings of our unbelief. As someone very aptly said, “Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances.”

On the other hand, the attitude of the widow was one of resignation to her circumstances and of surrender to death — *“that we may eat, and die.”* Where there is unbelief, there is death. But where there is faith in God’s promises, death is vanquished. The widow looked at the bin of flour and the nearly empty flask of oil and said to herself, “The end has come.” There was no hope, because she did not know Jehovah. How could she, if the people of Israel, who were supposed to know and testify for Him, had turned to Baal?

But God is the God of all. If His own people had rejected Him, did it mean that He would not reveal Himself to the gentiles, who were willing to cooperate with Him for the manifestation of His kingdom? No, for before revealing Himself to Israel in the power of His kingdom, He chose to reveal Himself to the gentiles. For this reason, in the context of God’s kingdom, Jesus said to the Jews:

*“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow”* (Luke 4:24-26 NKJV).

If God’s people reject His kingdom, He will reveal it to those who are not His people. Israel rejected Jehovah; therefore, the widow of Zarephath, along with Elijah, were chosen to be the first in their own generation to see the kingdom of God in action.

The widow’s hope depended on a handful of flour and a little oil, because she did not know Jehovah. How long would they last? What could God do with so little? This situation reminds us of the disciples of Jesus. When the time came to feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, they asked, *“But what are these among so many”* (John 6:9)? This is

## Knowing the Character of God

the language of logic and reason. But the language of faith is, “There is **God** among so many!” And, “God is well able to do all things!” Faith says, “*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*” (Matt. 19:26 NKJV).

The widow’s attitude was one of self-preservation for “*me and my son.*” Her reason and logic asked, “Why should I give my meager stock to a man of God”? However, she too had to learn the lesson of denying self before she was able to see the glory of God. As she trusted the Word of God, exercised her faith, and surrendered her all to the Lord, she and her son were delivered from dying in their selfishness. They also became eyewitnesses and participants of God’s glory. They were able to see an outstanding miracle. As she provided for a person who, later on, was to proclaim and demonstrate God’s kingdom, so she found out that God was capable of taking care of her need also.

Every miracle should be looked at in the right context. God does not perform miracles for the sake of publicizing His power to satisfy human curiosity. Pharisees expected Jesus to perform miracles. Herod wanted to meet Jesus to see Him perform some miracles, like a magician who entertains people. It was not because they wanted to believe, but because they wanted sensationalism. Jesus denied these people of the opportunity. Every miracle performed by our Lord was in the context of His ministry, which was to declare and demonstrate the kingdom of God.

The widow responded to God’s claim on her “*handful of flour*” and “*a little oil,*” so that it could be used for the furtherance of His kingdom. What resulted was that she and her son lived throughout the famine. They did not die, as they had expected they would. But because she surrendered her all, they became the recipients of His kingdom blessing, pronounced by God’s remnant representative, Elijah —

“*The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.*’

*So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did*

## Breaking the Silence

*the jar of oil run dry, according to the Word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah” (I Kings 17:14-16 NKJV).*

Praise God for His Word through the remnant!

### The Lessons of Faith in God’s Resurrection

There are tremendous lessons to be learned from the life of Elijah, As we continue studying the life of this blessed remnant man, we will see how he was taught another important lesson which helped him know yet another attribute of God’s character. He learned and experienced that Jehovah is the God Who not only sustains life, but also the God Who imparts life. He is a God of resurrection and has power over death. To Elijah, Israel was spiritually dead and terminated because of their idolatry. But the God of Israel, even in this kind of situation, could impart life. Israel could be resurrected.

A remnant knows God as a God of resurrection. Jesus Himself acted on this principle in the case of Lazarus: *“When they brought Him news that Lazarus was sick, knowing that he had already died, He plainly told His disciples, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sakes I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe”* (John 11:14 NKJV).

So that they may believe what? That God is the God of resurrection. First the disciples, then Mary and Martha, and finally the Jews — all of them had expected Lazarus to be healed when he was sick (John 11:21, 32, 37). Jesus had to manifest to Israel that God is not only the Preserver and Healer of life, but also the Imparter of life.

Elijah also had to tackle death before he could be ready for the ministry of ministries, which was to declare the kingdom of God.

In what kind of God do we believe? Do we believe in a God Who is weak and impotent in the face of death? Is the resurrection power of God an objective knowledge to us, or is it our subjective experience? In other words, what sort of a kingdom do we proclaim? Do we proclaim a kingdom whose King is sovereign and omnipotent over death, a kingdom



## Knowing the Character of God

within which death does not exist? As citizens and proclaimers of the kingdom, we must reign over our circumstances. We must not justify our failures as being due to our circumstances.

*“Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, ‘What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?’”* (I Kings 17:17-18 NKJV)?

Notice the woman’s statement, *“Have you come to bring my sin to remembrance, and kill my son?”* This shows her awareness of the relation between sin and death. But God is not a killer; He is the Savior! He came in the flesh, in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ, to settle the question of sin once and for all. Now instead of being preoccupied with sin which is the cause of death, we can be freed from it. Instead of worrying about sin and death, we can become preoccupied with God as our King and declare His kingdom. Elijah was not only representing God in His character as sin-hating, but also in His character as sin-bearing, sin-forgiving, and eventually life-imparting. Now was the time for Elijah to put his knowledge of God as the Life-giver to practice:

*“And he said to her, ‘Give me your son.’ So she took him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodged by killing her son?’”* (I Kings 17:19-20 NKJV)?

Did Elijah really know God? Could he, with his limited understanding and knowledge of God, go to Israel and proclaim His kingdom? No, for he, like the disciples of Jesus, had to learn about the true character of God. He had to know more about Him and experience more of Him before he could be sent. So God placed him in this circumstance of death, where he could test God for himself and experience Him as the Lord of life and the God of resurrection.

## Breaking the Silence

*“And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.’*

*Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, ‘See, your son lives!’*

*Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and the Word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth’” (I Kings 17:21-24 NKJV).*

What a glorious scene! God manifested His true character as the sin-forgiving God and the One who imparts life to the dead. Moreover, Elijah was also vindicated as both *“a man of God”* and the true prophet of God with *“the Word of the Lord in your mouth.”*

In summary, Elijah learned that God is not only a Provider, but also the Life-giver. A question arises here. Had not the woman surrendered her all, would she have seen God’s providence and His power of resurrection? Would Elijah have been able to do any of the things he did?

The answer is: she **believed** in the Word of God, **surrendered** her all, and **stood** on the ground of resurrection for God’s kingdom. Consequently, Elijah succeeded in what he attempted. Had the woman refused to surrender her handful of flour and her almost empty jar of oil, she and her son would have died. Moreover, she would not have had the opportunity to see and experience the resurrection power of God in her own life.

It took Elijah three years and six months to learn the necessary lessons of faith in a living God. Now he was ready for his emergence in I Kings 18, which is considered one of the most glorious and powerful chapters in the Word of God.

# 14

## Prepared for the Day of Confrontation

### “A Light to the Gentiles”

At this juncture, it is a great blessing to remember a reference made by the Lord Jesus to Elijah’s mission to the gentile widow. It foreshadows the gathering of the gentiles into the kingdom of God:

*“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow”* (Luke 4:24-26 NKJV).

The Lord Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the Prophet of God Who proclaimed the kingdom of God. But they rejected Him as their Prophet and King, and refused the kingdom of God. They not only rejected Him, but they also crucified Him and defied Him by claiming, *“We have no king but Caesar”* (John 19:15). They explicitly stated that they were part of Caesar’s kingdom! They pledged allegiance to the kingdom of Caesar, repudiating any representation in the kingdom of God. Jesus had come to them as their King, to bring them back into the kingdom of God. But after Israel determined to reject Him, He moved towards the gentiles, while saying to the Jews:

## Breaking the Silence

*“Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation bearing the fruit of it”* (Matt. 21:43 NKJV).

Thus, one of the prophecies of Isaiah was fulfilled: *“I will also give You as a light to the gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth”* (Isaiah 49:6 NKJV).

### “The Heavens Are Shut Up”

While Elijah’s faith was tested during the period of his preparation for the great task ahead, Israel under Ahab and Jezebel was deteriorating further into idolatry, immorality, and ungodliness, until *“the heavens are shut up”* (I Kings 8:35 NKJV). Then, Israel was going to see the consequences of their departure from the living God, the One Who was their source of blessing.

*“There was a severe famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab had said to Obadiah: ‘Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock.’*

*So they divided the land between them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself”* (I Kings 18:2-6 NKJV).

What a picture! The king of God’s people searching for grass! What a contrast between those days of wealth and affluence under

David and Solomon and these days of poverty and famine during Ahab’s reign! God was dethroned as the true, sovereign King of Israel. Jezebel had enthroned her own god Baal, the god of the Sidonians. She fed the prophets of Baal — wicked prophets who had influenced God’s people into idolatry and rebellion. Baal’s altars had taken the place of God’s altar.

## Prepared for the Day of Confrontation

The famine and the physical hardships of these catastrophic events were symbolic of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition. In all these adversities, instead of turning to God, Ahab searched for "*springs of water and ... brooks,*" which he well knew had dried up. In a way, he was enjoying himself in the midst of Jezebel's prophets and did not care about the famine in Samaria. Instead of being concerned about the sheep of God, the distressed people of Israel, he was more concerned about his own horses and mules. Instead of searching for the cause of the famine, he had gone out in search of grass.

This is a symbolic picture of today's Christianity in general. As the world is dying of hunger for the Word, as nations are turning to other political and religious alternatives, we are looking for "*grass*" to feed our own "*horses and mules.*" "*The heavens are shut up,*" because God's kingdom is not declared. False altars have replaced the true altar of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is under the influence of worldly materialism, secular humanism, and partisan politics. Why do we not humble ourselves before the Lord? Why do we not prostrate before God and say:

"Lord, we have sinned. We have forgotten the reason why we were saved. We have neglected to support Your kingdom. Lord, we have become religious. We are content with our once or twice-a-week church-going Christianity. We are more concerned about our own conveniences and programs. Lord, we think only of heaven and come to You only out of the fear of hell. We come to You to obtain Your blessings for our selfish, self-centered profit. Lord, forgive us. We repent of our selfishness. Lord, we are now willing to be trained, to go out, and make disciples of all nations. We are ready to declare Your kingdom. Give us another chance. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, not merely for our own boastful sensations. But endue us with power for the proclamation of **Your** kingdom. Lord, we have been looking for grass and springs of water and brooks which do not exist. We have neglected to look for the cause of our famine."

## Breaking the Silence

Ahab had sold himself and had become the slave of Jezebel. His palace had become the cage of every unclean bird of the air. Baal's prophets, like many vultures, hovered around his throne and from there spread the leaven of idolatry and rebellion toward God over the whole land. It is truly awful when the heart departs from the living God. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religion, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife. People like him go from bad to worse. They become more and more religious and fall deeper into the pit of religiosity — thinking, assuming, and presuming that they are growing in grace. The devil seems to take a special delight in making such people who are but instruments of his wicked designs against the truth of God.

### “The Enemies of the Cross”

Many call themselves “children of God,” but they live for themselves and serve their own lives. Paul wrote to such saints in Philippi:

*“For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction and whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things”* (Phil. 3:18-19).

Certainly, Paul is not speaking of non-believers. He weeps for believers who live a self-centered life, a selfish life in the pleasures and comforts of this world. These he calls the enemies of the cross of Christ. He is not concerned with unbelievers who are by nature the enemies of the cross, but rather with believers who have received a new nature and yet walk in the old ways of the flesh. They have fallen prey to a religious system which advocates the pleasures, affluence, and fashion of this worldly age. These individuals have accepted Jesus as Savior, but now walk in hedonistic paths not compatible to God's will. Their life, behavior, and testimony do not in any way help the advancement of the kingdom of God. Instead of coming into the corporate expression of the kingdom —

## Prepared for the Day of Confrontation

namely, the true church of the living God — they choose a self-satisfied, self-centered, individualistic lifestyle.

Beware of the false prophets who preach another gospel and spread the shame of their religious influences! Paul knew what he was talking about when he wrote the following to the Galatian believers:

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One Who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned”* (Gal. 1:6-9 NIV).

We see an age in which the very atmosphere we breathe is poisonous and toxic to a true spiritual life. There are many false prophets who knowingly or unknowingly are perverting the true gospel. The enemy, with thousands of years of experience behind him and a deep acquaintance with the temperament of the human mind, lays his traps all around us. Nothing but a constant fellowship with our heavenly Father and the Body of Christ can preserve our souls.

The vocabulary of God and His kingdom was not used in Ahab’s courts. He was supposed to rule his people on God’s behalf, but Ahab did everything but. He never considered his citizenry according to God’s purpose. When David sinned by having Israel counted, God’s resultant judgment came on all Israel. However, David’s plea was:

*“I have sinned and done evil, but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand be on me and my father’s house I pray, but not on Your people that they should be punished”* (I Chron. 21:17).

Here was a true king of Israel. He manifested the true spirit of Christ, risking himself so that the sheep may escape God’s judgment. He made sure the interest of God’s people was first and foremost and that they were safe and protected. This was an unquestionable evidence of a shepherd’s heart. Did not our Lord say to the Father, *“Those Whom You gave Me I*

## Breaking the Silence

*have kept, and none of them is lost except the son of perdition”* (John 17:12 NKJV)?

But what did Ahab think of? He was not one bit concerned about Israel. He was concerned only about feeding his horses and mules, while God’s people were going through a severe famine.

### “Go, Present Yourself To Ahab”

Meanwhile, Elijah received a revelation of God’s character, and his faith was strengthened. Now God gave him a new command:

*“Now it came to pass after many days that the Word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth’”* (I Kings 18:1).

Elijah was now equipped with an experiential knowledge of the Lord. He was ready to stand before Ahab. He was in total obedience to the Word of God, whether the command was “*go hide*” or “*go present yourself*.” He might have personally preferred the sweet fellowship he was enjoying with the Lord, the excitement of multiplying flour and oil, and the raising of the dead. He might have preferred to be fed by ravens and widows rather than going back to confront a wicked king and an intimidating queen. But these sovereign miracles and divine revelations that Elijah had experienced were all designed for this very day of confrontation. They were not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. They were necessary for equipping him for this day of conflict. They were not defensive in nature, but offensive. Elijah did not hide somewhere to be chased by Ahab, but he went out by his own initiative and presented himself to Ahab. He showed himself able and capable of representing and expressing God.

Ahab, the king of Israel, had failed in his mission to represent and express Jehovah, the living God of Israel. But Elijah fulfilled what Ahab had failed to do. Elijah stood there, before Ahab, with the full authority of God. Every word he expressed came directly from the throne of God. He stood on the ground of the remnant. He was willing and obedient to bring



## **Prepared for the Day of Confrontation**

forth his part in the kingdom of God. Was it not for this objective that he had been trained? The new command Elijah had just received meant confronting an angry tyrant who, along with his malicious queen, was after his life. But now, he knew the God Whom he served and was therefore willing to abandon all and stand on God's side against Ahab and Jezebel no matter the cost.

# 15

## The Sad Status of God's Servants

As we continue through the blessed remnant-life of Elijah, we see the progression of his ministry. Before he could come face to face with Ahab, he had to go through yet another precious experience. He had to find out why God had chosen him for His ministry. He had to be shown “religion,” and how its true nature is absolutely impotent in dealing with evil.

### The Impotent Religion of a Servant of God

Before confronting Ahab and Jezebel — two awfully diabolic personalities who represented and expressed Satan — Elijah came across a prophet named Obadiah. We have already read about Ahab looking for grass in the land to feed his horses and mules. He divided the task between himself and Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. It was in this setting that Elijah, as he was on his way to present himself to Ahab, came across Obadiah.

*“Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, ‘Is that you my lord Elijah?’*

*And he answered him, ‘It is I. Go, tell your master, Elijah is here’”* (1 Kings 18:7).

## Breaking the Silence

This dialogue is of great importance; otherwise, it would not have been recorded in the Word of God in detail. Their conversation continues as follows:

*“Then he [Obadiah] said, ‘How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where **my master** has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, “he is not here,” he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, “Go, tell your master Elijah is here!” And it shall come to pass as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But **I your servant** have **feared the Lord** from my youth. Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, “Go, tell your master, Elijah is here!” And he will kill me.’*

*Then Elijah said, ‘As the Lord of hosts live, **before Whom I stand**, I will surely present myself to him today.’*

*So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet him” (I Kings 18:8-16).*

What a scene! What a dialogue! What lessons we can learn! A book could be written on just these few verses. Perhaps some prominent Christian teacher will one day be quickened by the Lord to write such a book and awaken believers to the sad condition of situational Christianity.

The name Obadiah means ‘The servant of the Lord.’ But sadly, during their encounter, Elijah tells him, *“Go, tell **your master**.”* In other words, Obadiah is actually a servant of Ahab! He was supposed to be serving in the house of the Lord and ministering at the altar of the Lord. But the Scriptures say, *“He was in charge of his [Ahab’s] house”* (v.3).

Obadiah, enumerating his services for the Lord, reminded Elijah that he too was a servant of the Lord God of Israel. But what a poor way to start an argument, *“How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant*

## The Sad Status of God's Servants

*into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?"* To die for the Lord, in the mind of this poor prophet, was associated with sinning.

Then he immediately reported to Elijah that Ahab has sent his spies to every kingdom and nation to locate Elijah and have him murdered. He did not care what happened to Elijah, but he did care for his own life. He did not even ask Elijah about his ministry. One prominent thought occupied his mind — how to preserve his own life. He even confessed by his own mouth, *“my master has ... sent to hunt for you.”* For fear of death, he was not willing to identify himself with Elijah before Ahab.

He continues to present a list of his services for the Lord — *“I ... have feared the Lord from my childhood,”* and *“I hid one hundred men of the Lord’s prophets,”* and *“fed them with bread and water.”* His services looked noble and praiseworthy. But Elijah did not acknowledge any of them. He was involved in a mission which was the greatest honor for any prophet of God. And here stood Obadiah, thinking only of his own life. What Elijah was called to do **now** was what Obadiah and the one hundred prophets should have done **before**. The least they could do now was to come out and stand by Elijah. What was the use of one hundred **hidden** prophets? Even if there were one thousand or one million of them, it would have made no difference to God’s cause, nor posed any threat to Ahab’s kingdom.

While Elijah was going to confront Ahab boldly and directly, Obadiah was serving Ahab openly, yet serving the Lord secretly. While Elijah was breathing the holy air of the Lord’s Presence for three years and six months, Obadiah was breathing the polluted air of Ahab’s wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of God, Obadiah was going through Samaria searching for grass for Ahab’s horses and mules.

Are not many of our brothers in today’s Christianity in the same situation as Obadiah — falling prey to the friendship of worldly people and spending their precious life in search of perishable things, rather than standing with God’s remnant to declare God’s kingdom?

## Breaking the Silence

Obadiah knew that what Elijah was about to declare would incur the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel. Although he feared the Lord, he did not want any part of this. He was willing to feed one hundred scared prophets, but did not want any part of Elijah's ministry. He was willing to do anything, but did not want to identify himself with God's remnant. To him, it seemed too radical, too dangerous; it could cost him his life.

The remnant has always been and will always be considered militant. Why? Because they challenge the kingdom of Satan and the kingdoms of this world. The remnant says, "There is one King — Jesus! And one kingdom — the Kingdom of God!" Every Christian should be preaching and proclaiming the word of the kingdom.

Let us ask ourselves some questions: What are we doing? Who are we serving? Whose plan are we carrying out? Who is our master? What end do we have in view? Are we preserving our life, or do we trust the Lord to do it for us? Are we sowing after the flesh? Are we merely working for earthly objects and material goods? Do we have a higher goal? Do we get tempted with self-pity when we look at prosperous Christians (cf. Psalm 73)?

Obadiah knew about resurrection power. He probably knew that Elijah could be raptured. However, a mere knowledge of the resurrection and the rapture will not make a remnant out of anybody. All Obadiah had was an objective knowledge of the resurrection power of the Lord: "*And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a **place I do not know***" (1 Kings 18:12).

How right he was! It was "*a place*" symbolic of what he was not acquainted with, "*a place*" only known by those who have experienced God in His resurrection power, who live in the very Presence of God, who dwell in the Holy of holies — "*a place*" where today a child of God enters by faith in his spirit.

By being in this sanctuary, Elijah knew that Ahab stood on slippery ground. Soon he and his house would crumble, all his worldly glory would end in a lonely tomb, and his spirit would have to stand before God to give account.

## **The Sad Status of God's Servants**

Jezebel killed the Lord's prophets to satisfy her god, Baal. But those prophets, along with Obadiah, did not realize, whether hidden or put on Baal's altar, they were of no use to God. The only time they could be truly useful to God's purpose would be if they came out and stood with Elijah and against Ahab and Jezebel, proclaiming the kingdom of God.

When all was well, when the priests were doing their duty and the kings were walking in the ways of God, there was no need for prophets. They only emerged when the priests and the kings were not functioning properly. Only in such abnormal situations would the prophets come forth to make God's mind known to His people. Prophets were not supposed to hide, but to speak out and challenge.

In this episode, Elijah did not consider any of these prophets, including Obadiah, to be true prophets. The main function of the remnant of God's people is prophetic in the true sense of the word. Since today's Christianity stands on the same ground as Obadiah did in Ahab's time, so the need is greater than ever for a prophetic remnant, like Elijah, who will stand for the Lord and proclaim His Kingdom.

## **The Worldly Friendships of God's Servants**

So before Elijah could meet Ahab, he had to encounter Obadiah in order to get a good insight into the mentality of the best of God's people. In the same token, before we present ourselves to the world as God's remnant, we have to get a good insight into today's Christianity; and it is only when we are convinced that there is no hope in the Obadiah's of today that we will be ready and willing to stand boldly before the kingdom of Satan and challenge it.

Christianity has compromised with the world. The denominations are eating at the world's table. At best, they fear the Lord and feed "one hundred" hidden prophets. But they cannot and will not take sides with a small remnant to proclaim the kingdom of God and challenge the Ahabs and Jezebels of today. To them, it is too risky. Nevertheless, God has

## Breaking the Silence

always reserved for Himself a minority, who has been prepared and equipped to proclaim the truth of His kingdom by repairing His altar.

Now Elijah was quite convinced of the corruption of his people including the prophets. He was standing face to face with a so-called ‘prophet of God.’ They were each representing their true master. One was there with Ahab searching for grass to feed the king’s horses and mules, while the other — Elijah — was there with God to declare the kingdom of God. Undoubtedly, Obadiah was a prophet, but serving Ahab and his household. Certainly, he fed one hundred hidden prophets, but none of them, including Obadiah himself, could now have a part in declaring and establishing God’s kingdom in Israel. They had not been trained and prepared for this task. While Elijah was being trained, they were either hiding in caves or eating at Jezebel’s table. They were serving two masters.

We do not want to enter into lengthy discussions about the controversial case brought forward by people who say we are commanded by God to “*be subject to the governing authorities ordained by God*” (Rom. 13:1). Some argue stringently for this opinion, but forget the difference between “subject to” and “cooperate with.” The former is scriptural and is an act of positive obedience to God. The latter is an unscriptural assumption of worldly authority which moves people into erroneous directions and is invariably an obstruction to God’s will.

## Two Categories of God’s Servants

Obadiah is a remarkable example. He was not considered “*the troubler of Israel,*” whereas this was how Elijah was characterized in the house of Ahab. And this is how the true remnant will always be known. But nowadays compromising Christians, who cooperate with the systems and governments of this world, will never be branded as radicals, fanatics, or narrow-minded. They are no threat to Satan or his kingdom for one simple

## The Sad Status of God's Servants

reason — they have been occupied with the search for “grass” to feed the “horses and mules” of the enemy.

Such is not the case of the remnant. They are the troublers of the world systems. They are the trouble-makers for today’s Christian churches and for the tranquil prosperous Christians who are in the business of enjoying the world with its riches and pleasures. The god of this world is not unhappy with those who have one foot in his kingdom and one foot in God’s. He knows he has their one foot, and that is all he needs to keep them from fully getting into the kingdom of God. Eventually, he will make these believers to assume the name of “Christian,” while in fact they serve the kingdom of Satan.

Obadiah, by feeding the cowardly prophets, wanted to keep one foot in the kingdom of God, while he was searching for grass to feed Ahab’s horses and mules. If a prophet does not stand and speak forth the words of the kingdom of God, then he is no prophet at all.

When our Lord Jesus was laying the foundational rules and laws of the Kingdom in Matthew 5 through 7, He made it absolutely clear:

*“Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets...”* (Matt. 7:13-15).

The context of these verses shows us that Jesus is not talking about unbelievers. He is talking about two categories of believers. One group chooses the way of compromise, the other the uncompromising way of the remnant. Any prophet not leading the children of God to the narrow gate and along the difficult way is a false prophet. A true prophet of God will stand on the truth of God’s kingdom and lead as many as possible to find it. His fruit will be the children of the kingdom of God. That is why our Lord in verse sixteen continues, *“You will know them by their fruit.”* In this very context, He continues by saying: *“Not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we*



## Breaking the Silence

*not prophesied in Your Name, cast out demons in Your Name and done many wonders in Your Name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you...’” (Matt. 7:21-23).*

Certainly, Jesus is not talking about unbelievers. The context shows that He has a particular type of believer in mind. Who are these believers?

The answer is quite simple when these two designations are portrayed by Obadiah and Elijah. They are either **the Obadiah**s who fear the Lord and feed the Lord’s hidden prophets, or **the Elijah**s who — first, against all odds, are trained under the hand of God; second, go out to present themselves to the Ahab’s of this age for the purpose of challenging their worldly empires and wicked ambitions; and third, declare to them the King and His kingdom.

Christians and the church-at-large may be occupied with the question, ‘Is it peaceful?’ To them, it does not matter if peace is obtained at the cost of God’s kingdom. The majority loves ease, and often pleads for peace, grace, and love. Whereas the remnant, who is faithful to Christ and His kingdom, calls for dealing with the enemy at all cost. They are ready and willing to declare God’s kingdom despite danger and risk. For the majority, the things of this world are too important to be neglected in order to gain the kingdom of God, which at times seems so abstract and distant.

Elijah, however, did not think so. He was commanded to interrupt the peaceful slumber of sin under a wicked king and queen at all cost. Yes, they were in peace, but they were also in idolatry. It is in such predicaments that the remnant arise. They stand to raise a storm. So it was, so it is, and so it will be, until the Lord returns. The storm arising from declaring the kingdom of God is always preferable to the deceptive calm of compromise in the kingdom of Satan. We all wish that there would be no need for such a storm. But the remnant of God’s people must stand up and declare His kingdom. The majority is sleeping conveniently. It is the remnant, the minority, who is ready, awake, and willing to risk it all for the sake of God’s kingdom. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the

## The Sad Status of God's Servants

decadent days of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal and his prophets would have maintained their undisputed power over the minds of God's people.

But God raised up a man who did not care about his own peace and ease. He protested against the lull which had been obtained at the cost of sacrificing the honor of God's kingdom. Elijah might have chosen to remain passive, to continue at ease and in peace, to tolerate Baal and his prophets. He could have left the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But after three and a half years in God's company and under His training, having received all of the Lord's revelations, this one thing he could not do — neglect God's command and betray His work.

Having met Obadiah and seen how he represented the pathetic status of God's prophets, Elijah was now ready to meet Ahab, no matter what. All depended on him. He was willing to represent God's remnant even though it may have cost him his own life.

*“And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death”*  
(Rev.12:11).

# 16

## “O Troubler of Israel”

*“...and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Then it happened that when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’*

*And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table’” (I Kings 18:16-19).*

### Accepting Kingdom Responsibility

It is interesting that a sinner blames everything and everyone but himself for his misfortune. Human beings forget that everything against the kingdom of God is self-doomed to progressive decadence and ultimate destruction, because the laws of the kingdom are self-executing, needing no judge or jury, no police or jail. Break the law of the kingdom, and you get broken automatically. This principle refers to both individuals and nations.

Ahab, as an individual and Israel, as a nation, had sinned and turned away from the kingdom of God. Now he blames everything on Elijah and

## Breaking the Silence

calls him the “*troubler of Israel.*” Ahab does not realize that his own apostasy has been the cause of the famine. He sees Elijah as the cause, not as the instrument of executing God’s judgment on Israel. Like Ahab, our own generation also blames God for the miseries in the world. They do not want to accept any responsibility. They refuse to believe that by turning their backs on God, they fall under the self-executing laws of His kingdom.

As Elijah retorted, the blame had to be accepted by the responsible party. He rightly said to Ahab, “*I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and have followed the Baals.*”

## Exercising Remnant Courage

What courage to so boldly challenge a tyrant king! Remember, we are not talking about a democratic society where people have the right to express their views. This was a society in an era when kings had absolute power over men’s wealth, life, and families. One word from Ahab, and Elijah would be beheaded.

However, Elijah was sent by the Lord. He was endowed with the necessary power and boldness to confront this wicked king. He had counted the cost. He knew God. He knew that now all depended on him to act on God’s behalf to redeem Israel. If he could share God’s revelation, he could liberate his brothers and the nation from the grips of Satan’s tyranny. He was commissioned and determined to bring Jehovah and Baal face to face. He therefore challenged Ahab by suggesting to him to gather to Mount Carmel all of his and his wife’s prophets, those who ate at Jezebel’s table. What an authoritative command! It was as if God was speaking through Elijah:

*“Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred prophets of Baal and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”*

## “O Troubler of Israel”

The authority of Elijah’s word and command is evident in Ahab’s response:

*“So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel”* (I Kings 18:20).

Although Elijah was away from Israel for three and a half years, he knew the exact number of false prophets who ate at Jezebel’s table. While the whole of Israel was suffering from the severe famine, the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah were eating at Jezebel’s table. The world feeds its own. The world does not care for God’s people. But Elijah was not frightened by numbers. He was determined to challenge the power and the kingdom of Satan. As we stated earlier, he was resolved to bring Baal and God face to face in the presence of Israel. His people should no longer remain in the kingdom of darkness and in slavery to Satan. He was willing to put everything to the test. He wanted God’s people to know God as he himself had come to know Him.

The ministry of the remnant of God’s people is kindled when the majority falls away and plummets into the tyrannical kingdom of the powers of darkness, and consequently becomes hostage to false prophets who operate under a false religious system called Christendom. God’s people, even now, suffer either under the hands of **false prophets of religion**, or are at the mercy of **hidden prophets of God** who, out of fear for their own lives, do not dare publicly to challenge Satan’s kingdom. But that is not the case with the remnant who has a true revelation of God’s character. They are willing to forsake all for His kingdom in order to liberate their brothers and sisters from the kingdom of Satan. They are willing to challenge God’s people at all cost.

## Reviving Faithful Survivors

The remnant is willing to stand up and asks God’s people the same question Elijah asked Israel:

## Breaking the Silence

*“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).*

This is the true spirit of the remnant. When God’s people, through deceit and compromise, fall into the traps of Satan, their minds become darkened to the truth of God’s Word. It is then that God raises up and sends an “Elijah” to lead His people out of this darkness. It is then that the remnant becomes a guide to those who are still searching for God with all their hearts.

Although Elijah, out of desperation and loneliness, thought he was the only faithful one left in Israel, in fact there were 7,000 believers still faithful to God, who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). They were only waiting, we may suppose, for a leader or a prophet to surface, stand for the truth, and declare God’s kingdom. They were in a survival mode until the moment arrived for someone to rally the troops. They had no power to do it themselves. But they undoubtedly rejoiced in Elijah’s bold stand and ability to challenge the house of Ahab and his false prophets.

Nowadays, we also believe there are still those who have not knelt to the Baals and Asherahs of Christianity. They too are earnestly looking for the faithful remnant with the vehement spirit of Elijah to blow the trumpet and declare the kingdom of God. Then together, they will challenge not only the world, but also the counterfeit religion which is presented to people as Christianity. Together, they will cooperate with the Lord to liberate a great number of believers, whose minds have been darkened, corrupted, and contaminated by a materialistic, prosperity-seeking, hedonistic, self-centered, unscriptural religion called Christianity.

These words may seem too harsh, blunt, and unloving. But this has often been the case in the history of God’s people. In times of darkness a remnant has always survived to mourn over the wide-spread evil, apostasy, and deterioration within the ranks of the church-at-large. They have longed and waited for the light of truth to break forth once again and to proclaim God as Savior and King. A saint of a past generation wrote the following:

## “O Troubler of Israel”

“God has never left Himself without a witness. Although it is only here and there, we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted church in the wilderness. Yet we know, blessed be God Who let clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.”

It is the desire of my heart that those who read these pages will also earnestly desire to be one of these small, twinkling, shining stars of truth in the dark night of Christendom. We may be hidden by thick clouds of darkness, which cover those brothers and sisters captive to organized religion; but the Lord wants us to radiate the twinkling light of truth. Elijah was such a bright penetrating star. He was able to break into the very stronghold of Baal. He ‘overturned’ Jezebel’s table at which the false prophets of the powers of darkness were fed. It was only by God’s grace that Elijah was able to eventually bring his brothers to see the folly of worshipping and bowing to anything but the living God.

### Challenging Faltering Christians

Elijah’s question directed to Israel in effect will continue until our Lord returns. It is a question to be asked of every Christ-believing generation — *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him.”*

But the people did not say a word. Then Elijah made this comment to them, *“I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men”* (1 Kings 18:22).

Before we consider Elijah’s question, it might be worthwhile to comment briefly on this last statement. It proves he had insight into the religious condition and inward dilemma rampant in Israel. It proves that Elijah never considered Obadiah and the one hundred hidden prophets fed by him to be the true prophets of God. Because they did not function as prophets, they could never be considered authentic prophets. They might

## Breaking the Silence

have been good people, crediting themselves with a lot of good and religious works, even with saving the lives of others like Obadiah had done. But that did not make them genuine prophets of God. They could only be considered God's true prophets if they had been actively engaged against Ahab and Jezebel, and their false prophets. In their own view and even in the view of Israel, they might have been prophets. But not in the eyes of the living God Whom Elijah represented, because they were not an active remnant who repudiated Baal worship.

It takes a special quality of character to develop a remnant's life. God never called these prophets, because He did not find in them the proper caliber of character. They were too scared and too concerned for their own lives. They were more concerned for themselves than for the kingdom of God. After Elijah posed his question to the people, the Bible says, "*But the people answered him not a word.*" This only confirms that what Elijah was implying was true. They were wavering between two opinions — whether to worship the Lord or worship Baal. They could not answer, because they were not sure of themselves.

Israel had been misled and misguided by Ahab, Jezebel, and their false prophets. They were entangled by superstitions derived from an atmosphere of idol worship. They were in darkness and could not see their way back to Jehovah and His altar of mercy and grace. They needed someone who could see and could guide them out of darkness into the light of God's kingdom. And there Elijah stood, asking them the question: "*How long will you falter between two opinions. If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.*"

The Lord Jesus is calling us to come out of the false and compromising Christendom and take His yoke. As Elijah directed God's invitation to the people of Israel, likewise today, the Holy Spirit is directing the call to every child of God. He is urging every true believer to come out of the false systems of worship, idolatry, immorality, materialism, legal bondage to self, and many other spiritual enslavements, which operate under the banner and guise of Christianity. The Spirit is rallying us around Christ



## **“O Troubler of Israel”**

and His remnant so that we might be used to challenge these wicked, contrived, and corrupt systems of man.

Martin Luther certainly came to liberate God’s people from the bondage of religion in his day. They were being exploited and manipulated by an organized religious system and its hierarchy. But Luther never intended to create chaos. However, chaos now prevails and controls the majority of God’s people today. The present religious collapse is becoming ever worse in the eyes of the Lord. In Luther’s generation of church history, people had no access to God’s Word. But what is our excuse today? Does having access to the Word allow licentiousness, permissiveness, immorality, idolatry, materialism, divisions, denominationalism — all under the pretext of Christian liberty? No! By no means! This is not true Christianity.

Rather, it is like Israel under Jeroboam! It is like Israel under Ahab and Jezebel! It is like Obadiah who served in the court of Ahab, searching for grass to feed Ahab’s horses and mules. Yes, it is even like the one hundred prophets hiding in caves, being fed by the likes of Obadiah.

Today, we need people with backbone, like Elijah, to stand up to challenge the present system of Christianity, to liberate God’s people, and to lead them into the only true kingdom — the kingdom of God. If the church-at-large is in slavery to the kingdoms of this world, who are the Elijahs to lead them into the kingdom of God? If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit (Matt. 15:14). Only a remnant has the revelation of God’s character and attributes. Only they yearn to enter the kingdom of God according to His plan and purpose. Only they can stand for God and proclaim His kingdom irrespective of the cost and sacrifice required.

# 17

## The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars

Religion, buttressed by its hostile Ahabs and Jezebels, is enraged and infuriated with the remnant. But everything must be put to the test. The Lord Himself has pointed out, “...*wisdom is proven right by her actions*” (Matt. 11:19). Everything **real** shall remain, and everything **false** shall crumble. So Elijah made the following proposal:

*“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 light the fire.’*

*So they 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 round the altar they had made.*

## Breaking the Silence

*At noon Elijah began to taunt them. ‘Shout louder!’ he said. ‘Surely he is god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’*

*So they shouted 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 of the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no answer” (I Kings 18:22-29 NIV).*

## The Impotence of Religion

Earlier I made a statement about I Kings 18, describing it as one of the most revealing and glorious chapters in the Word of God. In the passage above, the Holy Spirit is revealing some beautiful and stark truths about the difference between worship in religion and worship in life.

For one thing, we are shown that the **number** of worshipers do not have any effect on the outcome of the worship — 850 prophets of Baal (450) and of Asherah (400) versus Elijah as the only prophet of God (I Kings 18:19).

We also see that **noises** and **shouting** by themselves have no effect. Elijah challenged these false prophets to call on the name of their god. Can you imagine 450 people calling one name in unison? What a thunderous noise that would make!

Moreover, **rituals** proved ineffective. The **dancing** of these prophets was a useless religious ritual and ceremony. **Length of worship** does not have any bearing on receiving an answer from God either. Self-induced **prophecies**, and even **bloodletting**, were of no avail. How can the blood of sinners have the power of atonement?

Notice how Elijah made fun of these false prophets: *“Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they cried aloud and cut themselves as was their custom,*

## The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars

*with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them”* (I Kings 18:27-28 NSAV).

What a sight! Here is a group of blood-strewn prophets performing a lot of ridiculous ceremonies, without any results. This went on for almost half a day. Once they realized the uselessness of their rituals and the ineffectiveness of their ceremonies, they tried something new:

*“And it was so, when midday was passed that they **prophesied** until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention”* (I Kings 18:29 NSAV).

Does not this show the impotence of religion? As they discovered their impotence, instead of turning to the living God, they devised new systems and new approaches. By midday, these prophets of Baal improvised a new method. They changed their system. Instead of shouting, dancing, and cutting themselves, they started prophesying. But nothing happened, just as we see nowadays in Christianity. After realizing the impotence of rituals and ceremonies, some have turned to prophetic utterance and others to preaching. But even preaching without the power of the Spirit is a useless religious exercise.

## The Significance of the Evening Sacrifice

*“...until **the time** of the offering of the evening sacrifice”* (I Kings 18:29). The time had come. In order to understand the significance of this event and this sacrifice, we have to quote Moses:

*“Now this is what you shall offer **on the altar**: Two lambs of the first year, day by day **continually**. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and **the other lamb you shall offer at twilight** [i.e., **evening**]; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering as in the morning, **for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord**. This shall be a **continual burnt offering** throughout your generations, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting **before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the***

## Breaking the Silence

*tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. So I will sanctify the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also sanctify both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God”* (Exodus 29:38-46).

I want to draw your attention to only those phrases highlighted above. For years, due to the wicked kings and corrupt priests, Israel had not heard from God. Now the evening sacrifice on the sanctified altar of God meant a renewal of their consecration to Jehovah.

Please notice that the evening sacrifice was not a sin offering meant to atone. It was a burnt offering, which represented a total and absolute consecration to the Lord and God of Israel. It signified allegiance to God’s kingdom and the acceptance of His sovereignty over Israel. The evening sacrifice meant God was meeting with the children of Israel. It meant that once more God dwelt among them, the same God Who had delivered them from the slavery of the Egyptians. It meant that once again they were His people and were freed from slavery to a Sidonian idol, namely Baal, a false religious system which was devouring their substances. It meant freedom from the tyrannical rule of their wicked King Ahab and his demonic Queen Jezebel. The evening offering meant the renewal of God’s covenant with Israel, but only if the sacrifice was offered.

### “The God Who Answers by Fire”

But there was one hindrance — there was no fire! Consequently, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal: “‘...you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the Name of the Lord; and the God Who answers by **fire**, He is God.’ And all the people answered and said, ‘It is well spoken’” (1 Kings 18:24).

Why was Elijah so insistent to bring Jehovah and Baal face to face before Israel? Because Israel could then witness “*the God Who answers*

## The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars

*by fire*”! Despite their corruption, the children of Israel had not forgotten their own history. They remembered when God brought their forefathers out of the land of Egypt, and He ordered them to build the tabernacle and the altar. They also remembered how **the first fire** on the altar was ignited by Jehovah Himself from heaven. They remembered that strange fires ignited by man were prohibited on God’s altar. They recalled how Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s two sons, were stricken by fire from heaven and died when they, in their ignorance or maybe while intoxicated, had tried to put strange fire on God’s altar.

Moreover, they had recollections of Jeroboam, who had built a **different** altar. Now they were under Ahab and Jezebel, who had built **multiple** altars. They recognized that Jehovah was the God of old, the God of their fathers, Who had ignited the fire on His altar. But they thought those were the “good old days” relegated to their marvelous historical past. They had concluded that the days when God dwelt among men and spoke to them were over. They thought man’s kingdom had replaced God’s kingdom.

Now it was Elijah’s duty to bring Jehovah and Baal face to face and put everything to the test. The 450 prophets of Baal had tortured themselves all day, but nothing happened, and God’s Word says, “...until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”

From the viewpoint of all Israel and king Ahab, the 450 prophets of Baal had done all they could possibly do. But the sacrifice remained untouched on the altar. Where was the fire to burn it? Could God send fire from the heavens?

Most probably, these were questions the children of Israel were asking themselves. The majority could not even conceive such unrealistic, unreasonable, and unscientific phenomenon. In their ignorance and superstitions, they assumed Elijah’s proposal to be impossible. Would God vindicate Elijah? Would Elijah be proven to be a man of faith? At any rate,

## Breaking the Silence

the evening sacrifice was now on the altar. The stage was set. All that was required now was the fire from heaven.

### Two Kingdoms Represented by Two Altars

Before we continue, I want to refresh your memory with regards to God's altar and the sacrifices offered on it. At the beginning of this book, I pointed out that the altar was identified with the offering presented on it. If a sin offering was presented, the altar represented an atonement for the sins of the offerer. And, if a burnt offering was presented, the altar then represented the sovereignty of God and His rulership acknowledged by the offerer. The burnt offering meant the total and absolute surrender to the lordship of Jehovah.

The series of offerings prescribed in the book of Leviticus begins with the burnt offering. C. H. Mackintosh (known as C. H. M.) rightly states the following: "If we begin with the burnt offering, we will see Christ on the cross, doing the will of God...." If we are not clear about the will of God, then it might be beneficial to remind ourselves of the Lord's prayer, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matt. 6:10). God's will is the establishment of God's kingdom here on earth. Christ's death on the cross of Calvary first and foremost was to do the Father's will.

C. H. M. continues to write about the burnt offering: "Christ, in the burnt offering, was exclusively for the eye and heart of God.... We are too apt to look at the cross merely as the place where the great question of sin was gone into and settled between the eternal justice of God and the spotless Victim — the place where our guilt was atoned for, and where Satan was gloriously vanquished. Let's give eternal and universal praise to redeeming Love! The cross was all this, but it was more than this. It was the place where Christ's love to the Father was told in the language which only the Father could hear and understand. It is the latter aspect that we have typified in the burnt offering ... the burnt offering did not foreshadow

## The Battle between Two Kingdom Altars

Christ on the cross bearing sin, but Christ on the cross accomplishing the will of God.... In the burnt offering, we recognize in type God the Son accomplishing, by the Spirit, the will of God the Father.”

The will of the Father was Christ casting out the prince of this world and establishing God’s kingdom. This is what the altar typified when a burnt offering was offered on it. Elijah was not there to atone for Israel. Elijah was there on behalf of God’s kingdom to challenge the kingdom of Baal; hence, his proposal for a burnt offering sacrifice. There, each kingdom was represented by its own altar.

*“So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of **Baal** from morning even till noon saying: ‘O Baal, hear us!’ But there was no voice; no one answered. And they leaped around **the altar which they had made**”* (I Kings 18:26).

This was an altar made by the followers of Baal. It represented the sovereignty and rulership of Baal. But next to it stood the broken down altar of Jehovah, representing Israel who had forsaken the kingdom of God. Somehow, somewhere, the God-fearing people in the northern kingdom of Samaria had built an altar for the Lord. But due to their negligence and possibly by orders from Jezebel, it was broken down. This was the altar which Elijah had rebuilt, and on which he was going to offer the evening sacrifice — the **Lord’s** altar.



# 18

## The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar

### The One Unique Altar of Worship

God had forbidden the Israelites to build an altar for worship outside of Jerusalem. The Lord had given an explicit order through Moses:

*"...you are to seek **the place** [Jerusalem] **the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put His Name there for His dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices...***" (Deut. 12:4-6 NIV).

So, how could the remnant of God's people defy this divine commandment and build an altar at a forbidden place in the northern kingdom of Israel?

### A Replica Altar for a Memorial

This was not the first incident of this nature however. In the book of Joshua, we read that when the Israelites conquered the land, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh decided to return to the inheritance allotted to them by Moses across the eastern banks of the River Jordan. After crossing the river, they built a replica of the altar to the Lord.

## Breaking the Silence

The word quickly was scattered, and the elders of Israel who resided in Canaan heard the news. Immediately, they dispatched prominent representatives from among themselves to question the motives of the two and a half tribes for building the altar on the eastern side of the river Jordan. They were very upset and determined to go to any extent to stop this “apostasy” in Israel. They confronted the children of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh with very harsh words of warning and rebuke.

But in response they were told that the replica of the original altar was built not for the purpose of presenting sacrifices, but to simply ensure that should the succeeding generations question their part in the Lord’s inheritance, they could point to the replica altar as a witness. They were thus securing for themselves the right to worship Jehovah and have a part in His kingdom. Their answer satisfied the representatives of the people of Israel (See Joshua 22:10-29).

## The Broken Altar of the Lord

Now a similar situation existed under Ahab and Jezebel. They had forbidden Jehovah-believing Israelites from going to Jerusalem to worship. But a remnant had taken upon themselves to build a replica altar as a witness that they still had a part in the Lord’s kingdom. They demonstrated they were not part of the kingdom of Baal. Jezebel had this altar demolished, but Elijah was still interested in it.

A more serious question remained unanswered in the minds of the leaders in Israel. If this was a replica altar, and no sacrifice was allowed to be offered on it, how could Elijah make such a proposal? All Israel, as well as the prophets of Baal and Asherah, recognized this principle. They probably thought to themselves that if they failed, Elijah would also most certainly fail. Fire from the presence of Jehovah could only ignite the altar in Jerusalem, and none other.

But Elijah had been trained in the presence of the Lord for three and a half years. He knew that *no sin offering* could be made anywhere other

## The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar

than in Jerusalem. But at this time, sin was *not* the question. Rather, the issue was the inclusion or the exclusion of God's people from God's kingdom in a place far away from Jerusalem. Ahab, Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal had convinced the ten tribes of Israel that Jehovah had forsaken them, and that they now belonged to the kingdom of Baal. Israel was convinced that they had passed the point of no return.

Now it was up to Elijah to prove the contrary. God still loved them and wanted them, if they would only return to Him. If only God would accept their **burnt offering**! If Elijah could bring fire from heaven to consume the evening sacrifice, then Israel would be convinced of their acceptance by the Lord, the God of Israel. But, would God really send fire on a replica altar located outside of Jerusalem?

A thousand and one questions went through the minds of the Israelites, but Elijah knew why he was sent. He had no doubt about what Jehovah was going to do. Nevertheless, he had to make sure that God's people also understood everything that was about to take place:

*“Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’*

*So all the people came near to him. And he **repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down**. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the Word of the Lord had come, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name.’*

*Then with the stones **he built an altar** in the name of the Lord and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs [22 quarts] of seed” (1 Kings 18:30-32).*

## One Universal Altar for All of God's People

Elijah, standing on the ground of the remnant, began to repair the Lord's altar which was broken down. What he was actually doing was declaring an important principle of the kingdom of God. But, it is crucial to note, if the Lord's kingdom was to be declared, it was to include **all** the children of Israel.

## Breaking the Silence

Unfortunately, there was no unity among the children of Israel. Immediately after the reign of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two — the northern kingdom of Israel consisting of ten tribes, and the southern kingdom of Judah encompassing the other two. Had Elijah called the altar by the name of “Israel,” it could have been misinterpreted, because that would have only included the ten tribes of the northern kingdom and excluded the other two tribes of Judah. The name had to encompass all **twelve** tribes. Consequently, “*Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of **Jacob**, to whom the Word of the Lord had come, saying, ‘**Israel** shall be your name.’*”

Thus, Elijah was telling the people it did not matter what they were currently calling themselves, be it “Israel” or “Judah.” What mattered was that they were **all** children of Jacob, and that they were **all** part of the kingdom of God. So the names of **all** the tribes were written on the altar. Elijah thereby was truly standing on the principle of the remnant. By including **all** of the twelve stones in the altar, he demonstrated God’s covenant with **all** His people regardless of their political division into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

God’s kingdom is indivisible. God’s kingdom cannot be divided by man. God’s kingdom is inclusive of all His children, provided they return to Him. For example, Christians nowadays may decide to divide the Body of Christ according to creed, doctrines, practices, nationality, color, culture, etc. But the remnant stands before God and His kingdom altar on the ground of unity and oneness. He is God and King of all His people. Whatever happened at the foot of the broken altar had a bearing on not only the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, but also on the entire nation, including the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the southern kingdom.

Elijah set up the altar only, and only on the principle of God’s kingdom. He could do nothing else but stand on the all-inclusive ground of the kingdom. C. H. M. makes an interesting comment:

“There are some who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would **retain an evil system and rest satisfied with**

## The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar

**giving it a right name.** But no. The only center of unity which God can recognize is in the name of Jesus....”

And what does that name represent? It represents the King and His kingdom. That name, as E. Stanley Jones puts it, represents “the unshakable kingdom and the unchangeable Person.”

Is not what C. H. M. described the situation today with the majority of Christians? Christianity has become a divisive religion infiltrated with pagan rituals and rites, with a lot of worldly systems and influences — **“retain an evil system and rest satisfied with giving it a right name.”**

The true children of God should not look at themselves as the members of a particular religious group, but as members of Christ. They should not consider themselves as members of a particular denomination, but citizens of God's kingdom.

Jerusalem and Samaria may have considered themselves as two distinct cities from separate kingdoms, but they were not so in the eyes of God. Elijah, seeing the folly and absurdity of this claim, erected only one altar in the Name of the Lord! He chose twelve stones, each stone bearing the name of a different tribe! Each tribe represented one of the children of Jacob! Thus, Elijah, despite their apparent divisions, brought all of them into the one kingdom of God. As a result, Elijah confirmed the unbroken unity and oneness of Israel in the sight of God.

The remnant of God's people, the true and faithful believers in the Name of Christ, cannot but follow Elijah's example of declaring unity as a vital principle in the kingdom of God. We cannot and will not stand on denominational grounds. That is not what God wants. God desires His own united kingdom. He did not appear in the flesh to set up denominations as sectarian vehicles which claim to have their own exclusive corner on the truth. God sent His only begotten Son into the world with this special message: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

We stand on the principle of God's kingdom. All truly regenerated believers are invited to join us in abolishing and demolishing the altars of

## Breaking the Silence

Baal, which have been erected alongside the altar of the Lord. Many sectarian altars of Baal have penetrated today's Christianity, and many sacrifices are being offered to the Lord on these false altars. They have to be broken down. The Lord's altar must be repaired, the message of the kingdom must be revived, and the one, all-inclusive altar of the kingdom must be set up. When the names of all God's true children are included, fire will descend from heaven.

### The Unbroken Oneness of the Altar

For centuries, we as God's children have been divided and scattered through the deceit of the enemy, the folly of our fathers, and now our own carelessness. Yet our God thinks of us in that unbroken oneness which can only be realized in His kingdom through our Lord Jesus Christ. God cannot condone the sectarian differences of His children. To Him, we are either a child or we are not. In His kingdom there are no divisive distinctions based on racial standards and cultural concepts. Why did Paul say the following?

*"...since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on **the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, **where** there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but **Christ is all and in all**" (Col. 3:9-11).*

This is the kingdom of God. As E. Stanley Jones says: "**Christ universalized is the kingdom of God.**" There is no division in Christ. Jesus in His priestly prayer of John 17 repeatedly prayed for this oneness among His believers. This oneness, I must emphasize, is a matter of **life** and not doctrines, lest some of His disciples set up their own denominations and promote their own kingdoms by centering their followers around their own teachings.

*"That they all may be **one** as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be **one** in Us, that the world may believe that You sent*

## The All-Inclusive Oneness of God's Altar

*Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one*” (John 17:21-22).

The oneness that our Lord was praying for in these two verses, and in all of John 17, is a matter of **life**. The children of God must realize that the ground of their oneness is **the one life** they have received from their heavenly Father through their new birth. The kingdom of God is nothing but the realm of this new life. How can we as Christians stand on sectarian, divisive grounds while claiming unity and oneness?

This is what Elijah was doing with the children of Israel. By inscribing the names of the twelve tribes on the altar of the Lord, he was reminding them that they were all the children of Jacob, whose name was later changed to “Israel.” He was reminding them of their oneness in life through “Israel.” Their inclusion in the kingdom of God was because of the change of Jacob’s name. All of Israel could be in the kingdom because of their common birth. Elijah knew and understood God’s mind. So should we. We may be criticized by other Christians for being presumptuous, fanatic, and unrealistic, but we should not give heed. Did Elijah care that Ahab had labeled him, “*the troubler of Israel*”? No. He was single-minded. To man, his mission may have seemed “mission impossible,” but to God, all things are “mission possible”!

God’s kingdom stands, and will stand forever! Nothing could interfere with it — neither Rehoboam’s adolescent behavior, nor Jeroboam’s shrewd policy. Neither Ahab’s vileness, nor Jezebel’s wickedness. Nothing could hinder Elijah from taking the position that a true Israelite should take — the position of a true worshiper at the one altar built with twelve stones. Oh, the blessing of standing for the oneness of the altar! This was the ground on which the remnant stood. It was so then, and it must be so today. The opposition swirled around Elijah while he was taking his stand, but by faith in a God Whose sovereign purpose he knew, he stood and repaired the one altar of the Lord, complete with twelve stones.

## **Breaking the Silence**

While erecting the altar, he probably thought of Joshua, who, after crossing the Jordan, had led the people of God into the promised land of Canaan to establish God's kingdom. As a first act of worship and memorial, Joshua had taken twelve stones from the River Jordan and built an altar for the Lord at Gilgal, thus declaring God's kingdom in Canaan (Joshua 4:1-24).



# 19

## The Consuming Fire from Heaven

What was Elijah's next step? Now that he had repaired and built the altar, what was he going to do next to bring down the Fire from the presence of God? The people were wondering if he was going to succeed.

### The Evening Sacrifice and the Death of Christ

Elijah had given the prophets of Baal all the time they wanted. But they did not know God's mind, for they were using the wrong altar. More importantly, they were contending for Baal and not for Jehovah. They were declaring Baal's kingdom, not the kingdom of God. Now was the time for Elijah to act. First, the altar was repaired, and then when **the time of the evening sacrifice was approaching**, Elijah knew the opportune time had arrived for him to act.

Why was it so important for Elijah to act at the time of the evening sacrifice? Because the evening sacrifice was a type of our Lord's death on the cross, a death which fulfilled the Father's will. At precisely the same time, when the evening sacrifice was offered, the Lord Jesus died on the cross of Calvary. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the evening

## The Consuming Fire from Heaven

sacrifice was offered between the ninth and eleventh hours — between 3 and 5 p.m. And the death of our Lord at the ninth hour (Matt. 27:45), or 3 p.m., corresponds with the time of the evening sacrifice.

Christianity maintains that God has provided a sacrificial lamb for the sins of humanity. This lamb was none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. He not only came as the Lamb of God, but also as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Let us look at the exact symbolism portrayed in the offering of the Passover.

Sometimes we look at the shepherds in the Christmas story and assume they were illiterate individuals. In fact, they were the most brilliant “agricultural graduates” of their time. They had the tremendous responsibility of raising 52,000 perfect and healthy sheep each year for the annual sacrifice. These sheep were kept and raised in a place near Bethlehem called Migdal Eder, meaning ‘The Tower.’ They had to be born within 30 kilometers of this tower, which is near Bethlehem. Since Jesus was to be the Lamb of God, He too had to be born in the vicinity of Migdal Eder.

Joseph and Mary acted as the shepherds responsible for this one Lamb of God, to raise and keep Him for the one true sacrifice on the one true Passover. Then came the week of the true Passover when the Lamb of God had to be slain for the sin of the nation. So Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through the eastern Golden Gate. Although 52,000 sheep were brought in through another gate, on this particular Passover there was one other Sheep. This extra Sheep was the One that God had appointed to be the only real Sacrifice for the sin of not only the nation of Israel, but of the whole world.

Later, He went to the temple to cleanse it from the corruption that the religious leaders had introduced into it. For the Passover, people were supposed to cleanse their houses from leaven, a symbol of sin and defilement. Now Jesus was doing something much more important — He was cleansing His Father’s house from the leaven of religion.

## The Consuming Fire from Heaven

That night Jesus instructed His disciples to find a house, which had been cleansed of leaven and was suitable for celebrating the Passover. He asked them to look for a man carrying a water pot and to tell him that the Lord would keep the Passover in his house. Who was this man, and how would the disciples know where to look for him? In those days, only women carried water pots. This man must have belonged to a group known as the Essenes, a Jewish sect who had separated themselves from the Temple worship about a hundred years prior. They celebrated the Passover a day before the whole nation. Why? Because He could not and would not be able to celebrate the Passover with the rest of the nation. That very night He would be betrayed, arrested, and put on trial for death by crucifixion.

A few days prior to the national Passover, on Palm Sunday, each Jewish family would buy a lamb. They would take the lamb home and give it a name. They would then put around its neck a name tag, containing the name of both the lamb and the family, so that the priest sacrificing the lamb would know who was offering it. During the days leading to the Passover, the lamb was kept as a pet. The family would play with it, look after it, make sure that it would remain perfect, and even come to love it. In this way, they would come to appreciate the value of the atonement for sins.

Then, on Passover Day, all of these lambs were sacrificed by the 700 priests, in almost total silence. At 9 a.m., the one sacrifice for the nation was taken by the high priest, inspected, and at 3 p.m. placed on the altar. They would first cut it sideways, then lengthwise. The bowels were then taken out and woven around the head of the lamb as a type of sin. The high priest would then declare, "It is finished," as the last sacrifice was offered.

At 6 a.m., Jesus was tried. At 9 a.m., He was nailed to the cross. At 3 p.m., He shouted, "It is finished," and gave up His spirit. At that moment, something strange happened. It was customary in Israel that if a father lost a son, he would tear his robe from top to bottom. When King David heard

## Breaking the Silence

of the death of Absalom, he tore his robe. Precisely the same thing happened when God tore the veil of the temple from top to bottom, as a sign of the death of His Son. At that moment, the 700 priests looked into the Holy of holies and knew that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Lamb of God.

God could not accept an offering at any other time. The evening sacrifice was a constant memorial to God's people of the time when God's only begotten Son, the Lamb of God, would die as the Substitute for humanity, guarantying their entrance and acceptance into the kingdom of God. It was at the evening sacrifice that God would meet with His people, dwell among them, and speak with them. It was at the time of the true evening sacrifice, the time of our Lord's death on the cross of Calvary, that the way into the very Presence of God in the Holy of holies was opened. For centuries, a curtain had blocked this way, but now, by the death of the true evening sacrifice at Calvary, the way was permanently opened.

*“Now from the sixth hour [12 noon] until the ninth hour [3 p.m.], there was darkness over the land. And about the ninth hour [3 p.m.] Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, Lama Sabach-thani’? That is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me’?*

*Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah’! Immediately, one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave it to Him to drink. The rest said, ‘Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.’*

*Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked and the rocks were split....”* (Matt. 27:47-51).

I have deliberately taken the time to quote the above passage, showing the fulfillment of I Kings 18. First, it is not coincidental that the Holy Spirit has specifically mentioned that the time of our Lord's death was at **the ninth hour** (3 p.m.). Second, it is not coincidental that the name of **Elijah** has been mentioned twice. Third, it is not coincidental that **the**

## The Consuming Fire from Heaven

**temple curtain** was torn in half. The Holy Spirit has recorded these details to make sure we understand that the true evening sacrifice was offered on Calvary and that the fire descended from heaven to consume the sacrifice. As a token of acceptance by the removal of the separating curtain, the way into God's presence was opened. Hence, God's people once again were assured of their acceptance into God's kingdom. They were met by God the Father Himself within the Holiest Place.

### Elijah the Prophet and John the Baptist

Elijah knew exactly what he was doing. God had conferred to him the greatest privilege: to repair God's altar and offer the evening sacrifice on it. In other words, Elijah was the one who, in type, ushered Jesus as the evening sacrifice — the burnt offering — to the cross of Calvary. He knew God's mind, he knew God's heart, and he knew that the Fire would come. Mount Carmel of the Old Testament was a type of Mount Calvary of the New Testament.

Elijah is the best type and example of a remnant. It is as though this blessed remnant's life is intertwined with the life of our Lord Jesus. He had a part in the past and he will have a future part in each new phase of the Lord's life and ministry. Truly, no greater honor has been conferred on any human being.

During the life of our Lord Jesus, the first person who publicly announced and declared the kingdom was John the Baptist of whom our Lord said, "*Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist*" (Matt. 11:11).

What made John the Baptist so great? In Luke's Gospel, when the angel announced the conception and birth of John the Baptist to his father Zacharias, he says, "*He [John] will go before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah...*" (Luke 1:11-17).

And again, during the event of the transfiguration of our Lord as narrated by Luke, we read the following: "*But I tell you truly, there are*

## Breaking the Silence

*some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.’ And it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the appearance of His face altered and His robe became white and glistening. Then behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease [death] which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:28-31).*

It was Elijah who put the burnt offering on the Lord’s altar in the days of Ahab, and now it was Elijah who discussed with Jesus about His death as the true burnt offering at Jerusalem. What a privilege!

And then in the Gospel of Mark, we read the following conversation immediately after the event of the transfiguration:

*“And they asked Him, saying, ‘Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ Then He answered and told them, ‘Elijah does come first, and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him” (Mark 9:11-13).*

Who was Jesus referring to? In Matthew 11, when speaking of the greatness of John the Baptist compared with those born of women, He said, *“And if you are willing to receive it, he [John] is Elijah who is come” (Matt. 11:14).*

The people of Israel and the scribes certainly knew the prophecy of their last great prophet Malachi, who had spoken of the coming of Messiah in the following way: *“Behold, I will send My messenger and he will prepare the way before Me [Jesus]” (Mal. 3:1).*

This is a reference to Elijah preparing the way for Jesus to be enthroned in Jerusalem at His **second coming**. People knew about Elijah’s ministry before the second coming of the Lord Jesus. But they had forgotten that this very Elijah was the one who offered the Evening Sacrifice during our Lord’s **first coming**. Hence, Elijah, the type, was fulfilled in John the Baptist, the antitype.

## The Consuming Fire from Heaven

They did not understand that Elijah's coming was parallel to the first coming, and then later to a second coming of the Lord Jesus. Elijah had to reappear the first time to offer the Lord Jesus as the Burnt Offering, and then reappear a second time to present Him as King. Yes, Elijah came, but he will come again, as our Lord also confirmed. He will come to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus and His kingdom. One of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation 11:3 will be Elijah, who will challenge the kingdom of Satan and will lay down his life in his opposition to it. Elijah and his ministry have been for the kingdom of God all the way through.

### The Consuming Fire and the Consumed Sacrifice

Now all Israel was waiting on Mount Carmel: "*And he [Elijah] put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood, and said, 'Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.' Then he said, 'Do it a second time.' And they did it a second time, and he said, 'Do it a third time.' So they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water*" (I Kings 18:33-35).

He had the sacrifice and all its surroundings drenched in water, which signifies death. Had Elijah gone mad? Let us read the rest of the story as recorded in the Word of God.

*"And it came to pass, **at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice** [no sooner, no later] that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your Word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, **that this people may know** that You are Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.'*

## Breaking the Silence

*Then the Fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench”* (I Kings 18:36-38).

Hallelujah! I Kings 18 is one of the most glorious chapters in the Word of God, because it is the type of our Lord’s death as a Burnt Offering on Calvary, and also of God the Father’s acceptance of this sacrifice. The Lord’s death and the Father’s acceptance of Him were fulfilled through the first coming of Christ, as demonstrated by all of the subsequent events, such as the tearing of the curtain of the Holy of holies, the earthquake, the opening of the graves (the licking up of the water), and all the rest of the events.

*“Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!’”* (I Kings 18:39).

Jesus is Lord! He is worthy that we should all fall on our faces and in unison shout, “Jesus is Lord”!

Yes, **the fire** came down from the heavens, consumed the sacrifice, swallowed up death, and put the prophets of Baal to shame. God confirmed Elijah’s faith. God delivered His people from their sad condition. The kingdom of God was no longer an opinion. It was a reality! God’s kingdom is the realm of His life, and there is not a trace of death within its boundaries. By filling this trench with water, Elijah had made it as hard as possible for man to approach the altar and for God to start a fire. But our God is the Almighty God! His fire consumed everything including death, as represented by the water surrounding the altar. Jehovah vindicated Elijah’s faith and the faith of the 7,000 faithful remnant, who had not bowed to Baal.

The kingdom of God had prevailed. The burnt offering was sacrificed. All barriers were removed. Now everything was right. And God was ready to pour down His blessing on the people. But before God’s blessing could be appropriated and enjoyed, all signs and traces of apostasy and Baal worship had to be removed.



# 20

## The Reward — A Chariot of Fire

After the Fire came down from the presence of God, consuming the sacrifice and swallowing up all of the negative elements, the people fell on their faces confessing that **the Lord is God!** Then —

### The Uncompromising Sword of Judgment

*“And Elijah said to them, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!’ So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook of Kishon and executed them there”* (I Kings 18:40).

Some may say this act of Elijah was cruel and unnecessary. But let us not forget his own statement when he prayed to God, saying, *“You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant and that I have done all these things at Your Word”* (I Kings 18:36).

Elijah knew God’s mind and whatever he did was in line with God’s commandments. What he did with the prophets of Baal was in accordance with God’s instruction given to Moses: *“He who sacrifices to any god, except to the Lord only, he shall utterly be destroyed”* (Ex. 22:20; cf. Deut. 13:5; 18:20).

As it was in those days, so it is today. God’s blessing will not come on Christians as long as foreign and pagan altars stand in our churches and false prophets prophesy in the name of the Lord. Preaching the truth in a

## Breaking the Silence

church where worldly traditions and foreign altars persist will not release the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us remember C. H. M.'s statement: "There are some who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system and rest satisfied by giving it a right name."

### The Separated Temple of God

Many have imperiled themselves with the world's idolatrous ways, and their end has been a total failure and a disgraceful destruction of their spiritual lives. They have ended up in a compromise. Paul plainly says:

*"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore, purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:6-7).*

*"For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has **Christ with Belial**? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God says, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separated, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you and I will be a Father for you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'" (II Cor. 6:14-18).*

Could Elijah allow Israel to co-exist with these idolatrous altars and the false prophets of Baal? No. Neither can we co-exist with this phony Christianity and its teachers. Paul, by exhorting and commanding us to "purge out the old leaven," is telling us to keep the lump unleavened. We have no illusion. Had Elijah allowed those false prophets to remain, not long after this landmark event on Mount Carmel, they would have turned the hearts of the Israelites back to Baal.

## The Reward — A Chariot of Fire

Elijah put the prophets of Baal to the sword in accordance with God's command and decree. It was only then, when all conditions and circumstances were ready, that God's blessings could be poured upon Israel. Such should also be the claim of the remnants of all ages! As we stand on God's Word, the corrupt circumstances caused by the false prophets will be purged. Their people-pleasing preaching will also be purified. Then the Holy Spirit will descend like a Holy Fire and bring revival.

We must not only repair the altar of God's kingdom, but also destroy the altars of Baal and get rid of his prophets. In Elijah's day, it was physical, but in ours, it is spiritual. There can be **no co-existence**.

## The Training School of Discipline

Now that all is accomplished, Elijah who represented the remnant pronounces to Ahab the coming of the blessings: "*Get up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of the abundance of rain*" (I Kings 18:41).

"*Eat ... drink*" were the only two words familiar to Ahab's ears, the only words prominent in his vocabulary. Had Elijah told Ahab to go with him and worship the Lord, he would not have understood. Yes, they were both Israelites, but one was in the habit of self-indulgence by eating and drinking, while the other was trained to fellowship with his Lord. To Elijah, it did not matter how he was fed, as long as he was in fellowship with the Lord. As our Lord said, when tempted by Satan in the matter of eating, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4). Elijah had learned this lesson in his three and a half years of training. But to Ahab, God's blessing was merely "*eat and drink*." Is this not a familiar plight in the current boom of the "prosperity-preaching" gospel? Nowadays, the message to carnal, self-gratifying Christians is the same as that which was given to Ahab — "*Get up, eat and drink*."

## Breaking the Silence

Elijah knew so well how to behave in every predicament and circumstance. First, he had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with dignity. Then, he had faced Ahab with a righteous, severe attitude. Next, he had stood among the thousands of his mistaken brothers with firmness and grace. Finally, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with the sword of vengeance. He knew how to behave in the presence of men — when to use **the Word** and when to use **the sword**.

But how did he behave in the presence of God? *“He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees”* (I Kings 18:42). Elijah knew his place before God and before men.

May the Lord have mercy on us to lead us into all truth through His Holy Spirit. Like Elijah, we, who desire to stand on the ground of the remnant and repair the Lord’s broken altar, must go through His school of discipline. We must receive the light of the Lord’s revelations from His Word. As commanded, we must declare and proclaim His kingdom. We must know how to behave before people in the power of the Spirit. We must prostrate and humble ourselves before our God and heavenly Father. Let us learn this lesson, not only from Elijah, the representative of the remnant of his time, but especially from the Overcomer of all overcomers during our time, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

## The Extraordinary Reward of Resurrection

I will refrain from commenting on the rest of Elijah’s life, as I only intended to study his life in relation to the altar of the Lord and as a representative of the remnant. But it is only fair that we should remember how the Lord rewarded this blessed remnant representative. Elijah received a reward reserved only for those who stand on the ground of the Lord’s kingdom, proclaiming it, living it, and always ready to die for it.

Towards the end of his life on earth, after he had chosen Elisha to follow in his footsteps, we read this about Elijah: *“Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with*

## The Reward — A Chariot of Fire

*horses of fire and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (II Kings 2:11).*

The same reward awaits those who walk in the footsteps of God’s remnant, whether deceased or living. If we are alive and the Lord returns for His Church, then we will be part of the blessed generation who will see the rapture and stand before the judgment seat of our Lord, where we will receive our reward or punishment according to the works done in the flesh (II Cor. 5:10). If we were to die physically before the return of our Lord, then as long as we live, we must press on, as Paul desired —

*“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected. But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching toward those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of **the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**” (Phil. 3:10-14).*

Paul was not striving for a simple resurrection from among the dead, the general portion of every true, regenerated believer in Christ. Rather, he was striving for that special portion, the reward of the remnant: The outstanding resurrection! The victorious resurrection! The overcomers’ resurrection! Or, stating it in Elijah’s terms, it is the resurrection-reward of **“a whirlwind and a chariot of fire”!**