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Chapter 1

ISRAEL 910 B.C.

CAN WE DRAW practical lessons from the life and ministry of Elijah for our times?

In what way does Israel, tenth century B.C., compare with America, twentieth century A.D.?

Each age of history, religiously speaking, compares with each other age. The variations are in degree rather than kind. Each period has its pattern of retrogression.

Revival is followed by apathy, apathy by compromise, compromise by apostasy, apostasy by disintegration.

Yet at each stage of deterioration there emerge those truehearted ones whose constant witness seems to increase in radiance in contrast to their contemporaries.

Thus Elijah's meteoric ministry shines brightly against the somber backdrop of his times.

Such drama calls for a stage setting and cast of characters.

Three prominent figures, apart from our prophet, dominate the scene. Each represents a distinct phase of religious deterioration and each represents a certain type of religionist observable in any age.

Obadiah,¹ steward of the king's household, represents the apathetic believer. He becomes a compromiser within the scope of our story.

Ahab, the king, was one who could use the language of orthodoxy on occasion, but was powerless to maintain any standards against the incoming Baalism.

Jezebel was the glamorous scheming pagan, whose Baalism could be considered not merely as apostasy, but rather as a demon-impelled, antitheistic religion. Jezebel herself was Baal's chief propagandist. Her father, Ethbaal, had been high priest in the temple of Astarte at Tyre. Edersheim² *indicates* that Ethbaal had murdered his king and usurped the throne. He reigned as king for thirty-two years and his dynasty survived for sixty-two years after his death.

The unregenerate Jezebel could only be expected to emulate her father.

We accept Paul's postulate that each stage of departure from true worship, and each espousal of an anti-God doctrine, evidences a deliberate step downward from a former knowledge of God.

¹Not to be confused with the minor prophet.

²*History of Israel and Judah*, Vol. V, p. 178.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21, 23).

Their departure from God, whether in the first or final stage, was premeditated, and constituted a repudiation of His Person and authority.

The religious concepts of the three contemporaries of Elijah stemmed from three distinct sources. An analysis of these concepts will serve to clarify the religious background of the era of our story.

As our story opens, less than eighty years had elapsed since Solomon's prayer at dedication of the Temple had been honored by the presence of the Shekinah glory.

A mere fifty years had elapsed since the kingdom was divided between Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

No doubt there were those still living in Israel who had at one time gone up to Jerusalem to worship in the yearly feasts. A remnant of seven thousand retained their orthodoxy. Though inarticulate, they had not "bowed the knee to Baal."

The priests and Levites had long since abandoned their vows of separation. Many had, no doubt, been

absorbed among the people. Many others had migrated southward to Judah. There remained not even a perfunctory recognition of the law or of the sacrifices of Jehovah.

The only visible orthodoxy,¹ and this without vitality, was represented by the "sons of the prophets." All but a hundred of these had been liquidated. The remnant had gone underground. Their only sustenance was provided by Obadiah, who professed to "fear the Lord greatly."

Even Obadiah was content to do service, for the sake of expediency, amid the abominations of the household of Ahab and Jezebel.

Such a vitiated orthodoxy could offer little resistance to the onslaughts of the two vicious but popular religions represented by Ahab and Jezebel.

Even among those professing orthodoxy, revival had given way to apathy, and apathy to compromise, within eighty years.

One needs but little imagination to see in this ancient instance of spiritual decadence a similarity to much of the professed orthodoxy of today. We need not cite cases. Our readers can supply these in abundance.

Ahab's state religion was, of course, inherited from

¹This orthodoxy was no doubt somewhat tainted with the rites of Jeroboam's religious innovations.

Jeroboam. This was an adaptation of a distinct form of idolatry to the worship of Jehovah.

To discover the identity of Jeroboam's religious innovations, it will be necessary to examine their true source.

Jeroboam, it will be remembered, spent a number of years in exile in Egypt. He returned, only after the death of Solomon, to claim the throne of the northern tribes of the now divided kingdom.

The golden calves erected at Bethel and Dan by Jeroboam stemmed from the Egyptian worship observed in Egypt and adopted by him during his exile.

The source of this form of worship can be traced back at least another thousand years to the ancient worship in Egypt of the Gentile God of Heaven.

The earliest records of Egypt indicate that the Most High or God of Heaven was known by the name of "NUT." This is an exact transliteration of the Babylonian ANUTI, the Most High God. The initial and terminal vowels were understood in the Egyptian form of the word although not indicated, thus the Egyptian word would have been pronounced (a) NUT (i).²

It will be seen that the earliest migrations to Egypt from Babylonia carried the name and worship

²The study of the worship of the Gentile peoples will be developed in the author's work, *The Gentile Names of God*, now in preparation.

of the Most High, and probably a fairly true concept of the Person of Deity.

A nominally pure form of worship of the Most High was perpetuated, in some cases for many centuries, by several of the Gentile ethnic groups following the postdiluvian migrations.

The sacrificial rites of propitiation, such as were known to Noah and perpetuated by at least some of the Japhethites, eventually deteriorated, and one or another of the forms of sky worship took their place.

One of the notable cases of a knowledge of the sacrifices, the knowledge of sin, and knowledge of retribution was that of the Cymric Druids. This knowledge was carried even to the British Isles, and the corrupt sun worship and human sacrifices of the Druids at the time of the Roman conquest, developed only after many centuries on the soil of Britain.

There is no doubt but that Melchizedek was a Gentile who was well aware of the true worship of the Most High.

The first stage of deterioration of the worship of the Most High in Egypt was represented by the worship of the Dome of Heaven. This development was pictured by the exaggerated figure of a woman, facing downward in the form of an arch, the fingers touching the western horizon and the toes the eastern. The philosophy back of this development was that the fruitfulness of the heavens in providence could

best be depicted by the figure of a woman, the source of physical life.

The next stage of descent was the representation of a cow, again involving the philosophy of fruitfulness and retaining the general form of an arch.

It is not difficult to discern the stages of deterioration from the primitive worship of the Most High to the calf worship. The Most High, as the true concept, was reduced only slightly in stature as the Sky God, or the God of Heaven. Next followed the worship of aNUTi as the visible Dome of Heaven. At this point, the Dome of Heaven was made anthropomorphic by the figure of the woman, thence downwardly to the form of a cow. This phase of Egyptian worship became fixed for a time and was common at the time of the Exodus of Israel.

Aaron's golden calf, and later on, Jeroboam's calves erected at Dan and Bethel, would be considered, at least by those who had had contact with Egypt, as legitimate representations of the God of Heaven.

Jeroboam no doubt had the idea of attempting to represent Jehovah by the figures of the calves. He would have been a charter member of the cult of tolerance, which is notably in existence today. "Call your god what you will, Brahma, Buddha, Jehovah, or worship no god at all, so long as you are sincere."

Mixed with this calf worship ascribed to Jehovah,

and using some Jehovistic formulas, were remnants of the corrupt worship of the various Baals introduced to Israel during Solomon's reign as a concession to his foreign wives.

As Ahab came to maturity, he no doubt considered himself an acceptably religious man and a nominal worshiper of Jehovah.

He had the formulas, some ritual of a sort, and a knowledge of Israelitish terminology.

We can readily recognize this identical philosophy in many of the religions of today that are labeled Christian.

There is a Christian terminology, the presence of the cross, and many representations of Christian worship in the ritual and paraphernalia. Accompanying this is an ignorance of the basic doctrines of Christ, or worse, an absolute denial of these truths.

A concrete example of this deviation of worship is seen in the Romanist worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The small black figurine had been worshiped for countless generations as the sun goddess. In order to capitalize on this loyalty, the Romanist missionaries merely renamed the figurine in honor of the Virgin Mary.

The lesser gods of the local pantheon were renamed for the apostles and saints.

A cathedral was built to house the worship. The

devotees submitted to the rite of Romanist baptism.

The timeless ritual of the Indians continued, such as the placing of flowers and fruits. The Romanists added the burning of candles and the ringing of bells. Only the phraseology was altered.

The Roman priests smile indulgently on these poor ignorant worshipers and laud their piety. "After all, they are sincere!"

Witness the so-called worship in thousands of churches in our own land. Christian hymns are sung and a ritual is repeated by Smiths and Joneses and Petersons.

The "pastor" preaches a so-called sermon, which may range from innocuous platitudes to outright denials of all that is Christian. Wesley gives way to Nels Ferré, Finney to Kagawa.

Unregenerate listeners consider that they have performed the pious duty of attending church. Unfed believers become numbed by the oft repeated untruths, and fall an easy prey to the more radical cults.

It is at this point in the process of deterioration that groups and cults, such as Mormonism, captivate those who are looking for activity as a substitute for spirituality.

The reason the monster Baal is not recognized is that we are standing too close to see his hideous profile.

The corrupt formalism of Ahab and the vitiated

orthodoxy of Obadiah were powerless against the newcomer from Phoenicia.

Jezebel's religion of Eros and Psyche had many attractions.

As high priestess and "secretary of missions" of the new cult, the young queen of Ahab found little resistance.

What was this virile religion of Zidon? Again we go back to origins.

The Phoenicians and their predecessors had, like the Egyptians, a knowledge of the Most High. As their morals deteriorated, the stature of their god was lowered.

The God of Heaven gave way to the Dome of Heaven. At this point the concept varied from that of the Egyptians, and the occupants of the Dome of Heaven became the deities. The sun and the moon became anthropomorphic as husband and wife deities. A pantheon of lesser deities, represented by stars, was developed by successive generations and added to the total pantheon.

The philosophy of degenerating worship is obvious. It is less condemning to worship the abstract Dome of Heaven than the God who inhabits Heaven. It is much easier to worship the visible spheres than the loftier Dome of Heaven.

Only a short step is necessary to give human attributes to the sun and moon. Thus we have the cre-

ation of Tammuz and Ishtar, Baal and Ashtaroth, Adonis and Venus.

By short easy steps this worship of the male-female principles descended to the lowest possible concepts and practices.

The basest sexual abuses became expressions of worship by the cult of Ashtaroth.

The genius of the cult was expressed by the erection of the pillar³ in the temple of Baal. This false worship had been a snare to the people of Israel on a number of occasions throughout their history, but never in such concentrated form as when it was introduced by Jezebel and adopted by Ahab as the state religion.

The Word does not spare Ahab in its indictment of his apostasy. We read:

Ahab . . . did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him and. . . As if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him (I Kings 16:30, 31).

Israel's spiritual eclipse was now complete.

Politically, the Northern Kingdom had been in a state of chaos for most of its history. Ahab was its seventh ruler in fifty years.

³Incorrectly expressed as "groves" in our English Bibles, the Ashera were the Phallic symbols of physical reproduction.

Omri, the father of Ahab, was the only ruler who possessed any political sagacity. Under his rule, Edom had been subdued and the fame of Omri as a military man extended well beyond the borders of the country. For many years the nations to the north and east referred to the Northern Kingdom as "Omri's country."

Whatever political strength existed under Omri rested on the very shaky foundation of human military skill. Certainly there was no reliance on the Lord of hosts.

The marriage of Ahab to Jezebel was purely for the sake of political accord between Israel and the Zidonians. Rather than bringing strength to Israel, it introduced the elements that eventually spelled doom to the Northern Kingdom.