



Fire from Heaven

Eight Studies in the Life of Elijah
from 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2
by **Peter J Blackburn**

1. Background

Solomon's Reign

David's son, Solomon, had a glorious reign. The area of the Israelite kingdom was greatest during his reign. He was noted for his wisdom, but foolishly took many foreign wives. They led him astray and *"his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been"* (1 Kings 11.4, also v. 6). He went after other gods and built temples to them.



We are reminded of the words of the Lord to Solomon at the time of the dedication of the Temple – *"If you will serve me in honesty and integrity, as your father David did, and if you obey my laws and do everything I have commanded you, I will keep the promise I made to your father David when I told him that Israel would always be ruled by his descendants. But if you or your descendants stop following me, if you disobey the laws and commands I have given you, and worship other gods, then I will remove my people Israel from the land I have given them. I will also abandon this Temple which I have consecrated as the place where I am to be worshipped. People everywhere will ridicule Israel and treat her with contempt"* (9.4-7).

Reflect:

- Consider Solomon and our modern world. Can there be *honesty and integrity* without worship of the Lord and obedience to him?
- In what ways does our modern world express great wisdom and staggering foolishness?

2. No Rain. Bible Reference: 1 Kings 17

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So God raised up opponents (11.14ff) and the seeds of a split in the kingdom after Solomon's death. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was a trusted leader from the tribe of Ephraim.

The prophet Ahijah told him that the kingdom would be split after Solomon's death and he would be king over ten of the twelve tribes – the northern kingdom of Israel. The Lord made a promise to Jeroboam too – *“If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you”* (v. 38).

Jeroboam Son of Nebat

After Solomon's death, the northern tribes rebelled against his son, Rehoboam, and made Jeroboam their king (12.20).

Jeroboam was afraid that, if the people went up to Jerusalem to make sacrifices to the Lord, they might be drawn back to allegiance to Rehoboam (vv. 26,27). So he made two golden calves, setting one up at Bethel in the south and one at Dan in the north, and said, *“Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt”* (v. 28 – recall Ex. 32.4).

He built shrines on the high places and appointed priests who offered sacrifices to the golden calves. So his reign is noted for the evil into which he led Israel (note 14.9,16; 15.26,30,34; 16.19,26).

Ahab Son of Omri

Following Jeroboam's death, his son Asa ruled for two

Note that *Baal* is a Hebrew word meaning “master, husband” (used of the Lord in Jeremiah 31.32). When the Israelites entered Canaan, they discovered that every piece of land had its own deity – there were many *baalim* – whose worship was considered essential for the fertility of the land. The Israelites were tempted to mix Baal-worship with worship of the Lord.

The particular Baal favoured by Ahab was Melqart, whose worship centred on Tyre, Jezebel's home. Baal worship did not only involve the usual lustful practices of the fertility cults, but even such abominations as child sacrifice. The worship of Baal was often linked with that of Ashtoreth (a Canaanite mother-goddess), and the use of the *asherah* pole.

years before he was killed by Baasha, who *“at once began killing all the members of Jeroboam's family”* (15.29).

Baasha ruled for twenty-four years – a reign marked by the same evils.

His son Elah ruled for two years before being assassinated by Zimri.

Zimri only ruled for seven days. Under siege, Zimri set fire to the palace and died in the flames.

So Omri became king. *“Omri ... aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by his sins and by leading the people into sin and idolatry”* (16.25).

The work of Elijah as a prophet was during the reign of Ahab son of Omri.

Ahab *“not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him”* (vv.31-33).

Reflect:

- What are the modern equivalents of Baal-worship? What practical effect do they have on our society?