

TAKE-OFF TO THE WILD BLUE YONDER

A bird in a series by Dr. Ric Perrin on ~~an~~ from **11 Kings 2. - 5**
Now when the sons of the prophets who were set to oppose him saw that he was about to depart, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they called to him and bowed before him. ."
11 Kings 2. 5

In 1834 the Methodist meeting house in Exeter, England, the preacher had just begun his sermon when a riot broke out through the doors. Seeing the course they attacked the preacher and began beating and kicking him. Others assaulted the congregation, striking and cutting the . They tore the clothes off the women, then dragged the outside and through the . A rioter forced another woman into the . Here he attempted to rape her, but she ran free, slipped over the . and escaped. A number of Methodists jumped out of the windows and fled. The rioters continued their tirade for several hours. No magistrates appeared to stop the disturbance or to protect the victims. A. D. Moore, *Evangelical Revival*, p. 2, 98, ()

Persecution in this way is common but it had no unintended consequence. It brought the Methodists into contact with the people who most needed religious revival.

His Sermon preaching out re i and the different too s God ses to change the hearts of en. A od y ew i oo t the too of teaching nd s gro ps. I nt to consider the re i inistry of E i h and E ish Pe se t rn to Kings 2. - 5 here we find the story of E i h's e e tion to he en y the fiery ch riot. In order to f y nderst nd wh t s going on d ring the ninth cent ry BC in the n tion of Isr e. I going to te the story in three p rts. **1. The plunge into spiritual decay, 2. The prelude to revival, and 3. The prophets' sons and their schools.**

1. The plunge into spiritual decay. A w o we s go we st d the gre t re i in Isr e th t too p ce nder the e dership of D id's he ro ght the r of the co en nt to er s e and for the first ti e since Moses. de the orship of God the centr foc s of the n tion. B t when D id's gr ndson Reh e o ec e ing, o t 930 BC, the ten northern tri es ro e y nd set p their o n ingdo nder ere o . Spirit a dec y in n tion, ch rch, f i y, or e en in n indi d -, often st rts with s a de i tion fro wh t God h s co nded. In the c se of the northern ingdo of Isr e, it e g n with the re ection of God's chosen ing. A h t ed to nother step of dep rt re. A he te p e s in er s e , nd ere o co dn't fford to et his peop e orship cross the order ec se it w o d nder ine his po tic p wer. Le set p o shrines nd cre ted go den c es—the s e ido th t the peop e of Isr e h d orshipped hi e Moses s p on Mt. Sin i recei ing the ten co nd ents. ere o to d the peop e th t the c es were the p re, ncient for of Isr e ite re igion—in spite of the f ct th t the second co nd ent for ids sing i ges in orship. And so ere o ed the peop e y fro God, nd Isr e e g n to w ither on the spirit a ine.

A he northern ingdo re ined po tic y nst e. Kings were re o ed y ss ssin tion, nd no ing co d est a ish a dyn sty nti O ri seized the go ern ent o t 885 BC. O ri rried his son Ah to the d ghter of the ing of Sidon, ho s so the high priest of the goddess Ast rte, the e rth goddess of A yre. Ast rte s orshipped y rios n a es o er the ncient or d. In Egypt she s sis. In B y on she s st r. A od y this s e n t re goddess is c a ed G i a L st e ning t the nit ri n ni ers ist Ch rch in Co i i p g ns ce e r ted the S e r so stice. O r ne sp per fe t red a photo of se f proc i ed w itch n ed C ndy ohnson. O r ne sp per c rried a photo of Mrs. ohnson h d ing a s a ido of Ye y a a est Afric n cre tion goddess, the s e goddess eze e orshipped in Isr e. Mrs. ohnson is q oted s s ying. I e got y spirit a ity, nd it s tifies e . Yo e got yo r spirit a ity, nd it s tifies yo . hy c n t we i e togeth r?" t te, e ne 23 200 B3)

A h t's ho it w ys st rts, with n ppe a to to er nce. hen eze e's h s nd ec e ing she insisted th t he i d her te p e here she co d orship B a, the C n nite god of n t re. Soon she h d g thered a rge force of re igio s d isors-- 50 prophets of B a nd 100 prophets of Ast rte. Ne xt, with the f p wer of go ern ent ehind her, she e g n to persec te the fo o wers of God. She o t w ed God's orship nd exec ted his priests. A r e e ie ers ent ndergro nd. A this too on y o t 50-55 ye rs. I f e er there s need for spirit a re i and w a ening, it s in Isr e. In c se yo thin it co dn't h ppen here, e r in ind th t Li ry Cinton's chief spirit a d isor d ring her hite L o se ye rs is one of the ost inf e nti a neo-p g n e ders:

and the religion behind A Gore's en iron ent aist cr s de is a odern ersion of the p g n worship 3000 ye rs go. A h t's ho c ose it is. Do yo thin we need re i a too?

2. The prelude to revival. A h t's the sit uation we find t the eginning of Kings 17. A hen, s dden y, witho t ny intro duction, E i h ppe red on the n tion scene. He sent a mess ge to Ah a infor ing hi th t ec ase of his post sy there wo d e no r in in sr e nti he—E i h—s id so. And then he dis ppe red. As the we s witho t r in t rned into onths and then into ye rs, Ah a's desper tion incre sed. He t rned the co ntry pside do n oo ing for E i h. t God ept hi hidden, first in the i derness and ter with a Phoenici n wo n and her son on the Mediterr ne n coast etween a yre and Sidon. hen God g a the sign a, E i h sent nother mess ge to Ah a. A i e's p' Le ch a enged the prophets of B a and Ast r te to a contest. A hey'd e ch i d n t r and in oe their deity to ight the s crifice with a ot of ighting. A he eeting s gred, and the peop e of the n tion ci ed Mt. C r e to w tch. e een p on the roc y s it of Mt. C r e. Fro there yo c n o'er oo the P in of Megiddo here so ny tt es h a een fo ght thro gh o t history. A he point is th t this s s n ti te sho do n etween the God of the i erse and the s rper, B a and a sr e wo d e ffecte y the res ts.

Yo rec a the story. E i h a o ed the p g n priests to go first. B a s the stor god, wo ro ght r in and contro ed the ighting. E i h s p ying right into B a's strength, and B a's priests were s pre e y confident. B t of co rse, nothing h ppened, for B a does not exist. A hen it s E i h's t r. He i t n t r of we e stones and d g trench ro nd the t r. He i ed the s crifice and orderd th t rre s of w ter e ro ght fro the Mediterr ne n. He po red the w ter o'er the s crifice so there s no possi i ty of a tric . A hen he pr yed, and God is, ered with fire so hot th t e en the roc s of the t r e ted. E i h e sec ted the prophets of B a and then w rned e eryone to r n, for r in i e yo e ne er seen s a ot to f a .

A his story h s so ething i port nt to te ch s. Re i a co es on y y the po er of God. Yo and c nnot prod ce it y o r o'n efforts or str tegies. Re i a co es ec ase God rings it. e s t w it for God to ct. If yo sense the need for re i a in o r ti e--in o r n tion, in o r ch rch, in yo r f a i y, in yo r he rt--yo c nnot a e it h ppen, and yo c nnot a e God do nything he is not re dy to do. B t th t does not e n th t there is nothing we c n do. e c n pr y. e c n s God to send his Spirit and ring re i a to s. A here we e a ot of peop e in sr e d ring those ti es wo ne er g a e re i a a tho ght, st s there re ny peop e tod y wo do not thin a ot re i a. A hey re quite content to go on i ing a st s they re. ho do yo s ppose it s in sr e wo did pr y for God to re i e the n tion? n Kings 8 we find a c e. e eet a n n a ed O di h wo s a inister in Ah a's go ern ent. O di h preser ed the i es of a h ndred prophets of God, hiding the in a c e and pro iding the with food and w ter. A he prophets were pre chers and te chers. It w sn't s fe for the to ppe r in p ic. eze e h d gi en orders to i the . s spect th t they spent their d ys and nights pr ying. Yo and re in the s a e position tod y. e re not in hiding, t we re the ones wo a st pr y for God to send re i a. Are yo doing th t?

3. The prophets' sons and their schools. After this prelude to the re-ignition of Elisha's ministry, the text tells us that Elisha was a young man, the son of a wealthy family, and he was better fitted for the work of organizing a religion than Elisha's. Elisha's roughness, so to speak, was a sign of his power. Elisha's strength was both the poor and the upper classes of society. He was the one who set the work of preaching and teaching. Before the time of David, Samuel the judge established a series of schools around the country. He made regular circuits to the communities where these schools existed, teaching and training his students and sending the word to teach the people. It was the same mode that George Whitefield and the Wesleyans followed in England in the 1700s. And it is what Elisha and Elisha did during the ninth century BC. In Kings 2 we have the story of how Elisha succeeded Elisha's order of the re-ignition. We also find an indication of where three of the schools of the sons of the prophets were established. Please turn there with me.

Verse begins the account. *It came about when he Lord was about to take up his journey and to Bethel, that he went with a few "sons" of Gilead about ten miles north of the Dead Sea in the west end of the Jordan River. Elisha and Elisha were apparently going from one to the other of the various schools they had established. These schools were community societies where men and their families came to study the word of God. They were places for prayer, they were centers where people from the towns and surrounding countryside could come and worship God, and they were places from which the sons of the prophets could go out on preaching missions to call the people back to God. In verse 2 Elisha tries to get Elisha to remain in Gilead while he travels westward to Bethel. But Elisha now says that he is coming and will not leave Elisha. So together they go to the second of the schools at Bethel. Bethel was one of the holiest spots in Israel. Arah stayed there when he first entered the promised land. It was his vision of the ladder to heaven there. Verse 3 indicates that the sons of the prophets at Bethel so now were going to happen, and they were buzzing about it. But Elisha won't let the sons say anything to Elisha. In verse 4 they press on together to the third school which is located in the Dead Sea area at Jericho. Elisha tries one last time to ditch Elisha but Elisha still refuses to leave him. So the two leave their way to the Jordan River. Fifty of the sons of the prophets follow the two in distance.*

At the Jordan, Elisha strikes the water with his staff. He waters part and he and Elisha cross to the east end. Now, in verse 9, Elisha says to Elisha for a final and parting gift. *“Please, let me have a part of your spirit when I die.”* In Israel the law of inheritance was that the father's estate was to be divided equally among each of his sons, but the oldest son would receive double the portion. So Elisha is saying for himself that the spirit that the powerful Elisha might give him. In other words, that Elisha might be Elisha's successor to carry on the work of the re-ignition. Elisha's concern is that the work of God should continue. Elisha tells him that it's not for him to give this. Re-ignition comes from God. But Elisha tells him if Elisha sees Elisha's departure to heaven, that he will give the sign. And that is how the fiery chariot driven by horses of fire sweeps out of the clouds and scoops up Elisha and carries him into the sky. As he goes, his staff falls at Elisha's feet, and he picks it up, and he goes to the edge of the river, and he cries out. *“Where is the Lord, the God of Elisha?”* (Le 17:15) He struck the water and the river parted. He re-ignition would continue. He succeeding chapters recount the work of Elisha.

She continued and expanded the schools of the prophets. Let each be the confident and advisor of the things of Israel. Let it lead to the age of 85 or 90 years of age. And the word of God spread through the land.

Are you saying, "Here is the Lord, the God of Eilat?" Will God send relief in our time? If so, how? Will relief come? As it stands, it is not enough for you and I to be satisfied with general expositions to the church, to worship, to the things of God. Not if we, in Eilat, wish to see relief and our children to live in a nation here righteousness and truth prevail. We must not tire for granted that the influence of the gospel will continue to shape our culture or will preserve your family in the future. We have already seen how easily of this can be lost. Instead, you and I must devote ourselves to three things. First, we need to participate in **small groups** of Christians. We live here, we study God's word, and learn to apply it. The Methodists had something we ought to continue. Small groups are the place we learn to pray and to see the answers to our prayers unfolded. We offer small groups at Cornerstone. We are planning new groups for this Fall. Some are for couples. Others are for men with men. We provide women's Bible studies. Please plan to participate in such a group.

Second, we must insist on **social connection**. Again, small groups provide this part of our Christian experience. In a small group you find others who share your spiritual journey. Someone knows you and you know them well enough to share your deepest needs and burdens, and to celebrate the blessings in your life together. You have others who encourage you when you grow discouraged or tired. And if you ever, they are there to help hold you up. Our Christian faith is not something we can successfully do alone. We must be part of a community.

Third, we must devote **sacred priorities** for ourselves and our families. Here is one you should take in each week. What is most important? What activities are bringing the