

THESE ARE
THE DAYS OF
ELIJAH

How God Uses Ordinary People
to Do Extraordinary Things

R. T. KENDALL



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Foreword

Abraham Heschel once wrote, “To be a prophet is both a distinction and an affliction.” Elijah was no exception. Few prophets in Scripture have provoked as many ministers, challenged as many evangelists and inspired as many prophets as Elijah. This man from the desert, who seemed to be on the one hand invincible and on the other hand cowardly, was as much an enigma then as he is today.

He is unique. He could run faster than a horse-driven chariot. He is one of two humans in Scripture taken to heaven before they tasted death. He is the only one, other than Jesus, who, it is prophesied, will return to earth before the “Day of the Lord.” He is one of two who have seen the backside of God as He passed by. If that is not strange enough, he is the only one with an anointing great enough to call down fire from heaven. He was in the lineage of the ecstatic prophets, whose mere presence seemed to defy human anticipation, and to be determined solely by the Spirit of God rather than themselves.

Yet Elijah was also human, with emotions, fears, doubts and moments of elation, just like you and me. He lived in an era of high occult activity. He was a focal point in the clash between Yahweh and Baal, spurred on by Ahab, who sold himself to do evil, and even more so by Jezebel, who would stop at nothing, including murdering the innocent and worshipping demons, to get her way. Elijah stood up against the odds and proclaimed Mosaic righteousness when decadence was politically correct.

Elijah was a paradox, a walking contradiction of foresight and blindness, faith and fear, power and weakness. He killed 850 false prophets, yet ran from one woman. He demanded that a dying widow feed him before she fed herself and her son, then years later raised that son from the dead. Egocentrically he complained to God that he alone was left, and God had to burst that bubble by telling him there were seven thousand others who had not bowed their knees to Baal. He complained of hunger, ate food brought to him by ravens and walked two hundred miles to Mount Sinai after eating one loaf of bread that an angel baked for him.

Elijah taunted kings, complained to God, healed people and actually changed the course of nature. Elijah was a prophet's prophet, a man's man with a nature just like yours and mine.

R. T. Kendall has captured a stable of hidden truths that lie behind the scenes in the life of this unique prophet and man of God. He unfolds how God took a weak man and transformed him into a giant. He discloses the importance of the overlooked, and he rightly positions God as the core of Elijah's life. R. T.'s insight and biblical knowledge allow him to clarify the levels in which God speaks to and through prophets. That alone is worth a hundred times the price of this book.

R. T. has also unraveled the mystery of what I feel is the oft-overlooked crux of Elijah's ministry: He was a human being who dared to believe God would use him. That is not as simple as the novice might think. In *These Are the Days of Elijah*, R. T. Kendall has found a way of making the complex seem simple. He has untangled the knot that others have tried to untie and could not.

Every pastor, evangelist and teacher should read this book; and it is a "must-read" for all who believe they might have even a small modicum of prophetic gifting.

John Paul Jackson
Founder, Streams Ministries International

Introduction

Elijah was one of the most outstanding prophets of the Old Testament—and certainly the most colorful. He stands next to Moses, the greatest prophet of all. It was Moses and Elijah who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus (see Matthew 17:3). These two men represented the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) of the Old Testament.

Elijah was in the succession of a new era of prophets beginning with Samuel. Between the time of Moses and Samuel the word of God was “rare,” which means that God had not raised up many to speak His word for a long period of time (see 1 Samuel 3:1). But with the emergence of Samuel a new kind of prophetic ministry was begun, anticipating men like Nathan (see 2 Samuel 7:2), Gad (see 2 Samuel 24:11) and Elijah—and eventually the canonical prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah whose words became Scripture.

Elijah was not a canonical prophet (there is no book in the Bible named after him), but his ministry and impact were unforgettable. Although his successor Elisha is said to have

had double the anointing that was on Elijah (see 2 Kings 2:9–12), future generations remembered Elijah more than they did Elisha. He was mentioned at the end of the book of Malachi (see Malachi 4:5–6). Gabriel said that John the Baptist would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah (see Luke 1:17). When Jesus cried out in Aramaic, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*,” bystanders thought He was calling for Elijah (see Mark 15:34–35).

Prophets were known as “seers” through the time of Samuel (see 1 Samuel 9:9). An example of the gifting of seer was Samuel’s discerning that Saul (before he was king) was trying to find some lost donkeys. Looking for the seer, they came upon Samuel who acknowledged his position and then added—before being told why he was being sought—“As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found” (1 Samuel 9:20).

The role of the prophet was expanded to include not only seeing into people’s lives but also speaking directly for God—and even predicting the future. The canonical prophets predicted not only the immediate future but sometimes the far distant future, as in the case of people like Isaiah and Daniel. Elijah’s time of ministry was in between the era of early prophets and canonical prophets. He was a man who confronted idolatry in Israel but also who performed miracles.

What strikes me most about Elijah is that he was both extraordinary and ordinary. He was spectacular—stating boldly, for example, that it would not rain until he gave the word; and there was not a drop of rain for three and a half years. Yet James noted that Elijah was a man “just like us” because he was so very, very human (James 5:17). Elijah took himself too seriously; he felt he was the only prophet around who was worth a grain of salt and fancied he was a cut above all

before him. He was very human indeed. This is what makes a study of Elijah so thrilling. If God could use a man as human as Elijah was, there is hope for all of us!

My first recollection of the name *Elijah* goes back to my childhood memories. My first pastor, the Rev. Gene Phillips, preached a sermon on Elijah in my old church in Ashland, Kentucky. I was probably eight years old. I do not remember a single word in the sermon, but I remember the atmosphere. The impact was electric. My father reckoned it was the greatest sermon he ever heard. What a wonderful gift that a preacher could be remembered like that, and yet Elijah's very life and ministry would be remembered forever!

The following chapters are edited from my final series of Sunday evening sermons I preached as minister of Westminster Chapel, from September 2000 to December 2001. I pray that each of these will be used by the Holy Spirit to speak directly to your heart and life.

1

The Oath

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

1 Kings 17:1

Without any introduction, warning, explanation or preparation for what was coming, Elijah suddenly appears. Out of the blue. Just like that. He is simply called Elijah the Tishbite. We are not given any more information except that he was from Gilead and that he made a stunning prediction to Ahab the king who had done “more evil in the eyes of the LORD” than any of the kings before him (1 Kings 16:30).

Elijah confronted the wicked Ahab with an amazing word—that there would not be a drop of rain, not even dew

on the grass, unless Elijah himself commanded it. “Except at my word,” said Elijah. Extraordinary. Bold. You could almost say it was an impudent, if not immodest, claim. “I alone will determine when it will rain next,” Elijah was shamelessly predicting. Not since the days of Moses had there been anyone like him.

The Atmosphere in His Day

The times in which Elijah flourished were characterized by an atmosphere of spiritual degeneration. This was during the era of the wicked King Ahab. Ahab not only considered it “trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam,” but married Jezebel—an evil woman—and began to serve and worship Baal. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord “than did all the kings of Israel before him” (1 Kings 16:31–33).

It was a demonic atmosphere in which Elijah ministered. *Baal* means “lord, master, owner, possessor.” To worship Baal was to open one’s heart to the demonic world. Every Christian needs to learn not to play fast and loose with the demonic—such as playing with a Ouija board, following your astrology chart or going to a fortune-teller. Avoid these with all your heart. In the case of Ahab, there was more, for he rebuilt Jericho and did so in the face of Joshua’s pronouncement generations before: “Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho” (Joshua 6:26).

How would you like to live in an atmosphere like that? Many ministers today look for a church that is already established or want to preach where there are many Christians. They want to be in a Bible belt. Elijah did not have that privilege. God looks for people who will go outside their comfort zones. Part of the genius of the apostle Paul, for example,

was that he wanted to go where the Gospel had not been known (see Romans 15:20). I am reminded of something John Wesley wrote in his journal when he observed the evil and wickedness in Newcastle, England: “Never in my life have I heard such language, such swearing and have seen such wickedness. Ripe for revival.”

I think you and I are in an evil day, too. We *could* run away from our responsibilities or make excuses for the conditions of our time. Or we could adopt Wesley’s position and see things as being a good sign that God might step in soon! After all, God sent Jesus into the world when conditions in Israel were at their worst. This is why He died on a cross. Paul could say, “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20).

The name *Elijah* means “my God is Yahweh.” In the Old Testament a person’s name was often bound up with his calling. He had a nickname: Elijah “the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead.” Gilead was an area east of the Jordan River in Manasseh. *Tishbe* also means “settler,” but little else is known.

Elijah was almost certainly a lonely man. Many of God’s sovereign vessels are very lonely, including those who are married. I predict that when we get to heaven we will be amazed how many of God’s choice servants were unhappily married—as in the case of both George Whitefield and John Wesley. But sometimes lonely people—partly because they are not always accountable to anybody—take themselves too seriously. It was certainly one of Elijah’s weaknesses.

Although we know little about the man Elijah before his appearance in 1 Kings 17:1, his opening statement to Ahab tells a lot about his relationship to the God of Israel. He revealed several important things to Ahab in this opening line—such

as the nature of God and God's commitment to the people He has chosen. Here are five particular points he made.

The Living God

First, Elijah showed something of the nature of his God. Elijah's God is the *living* God. He not only exists but is alive and active. His God is not what deists would call an "absentee watchmaker"—a God who made the world and left it to run on its own. No. Elijah's God is totally on top of things, in constant touch day and night with all His people and all creation. As the old spiritual put it, "He sees all we do, He hears all we say." Nothing escapes God's notice and everything that is going on matters deeply to Him. But that was not Elijah's main point here in confronting Ahab.

There is a type of evangelical today known as "cessationist." This means that God "ceased" to deal with His people in an extraordinary manner after the closing of the canon of Scripture. Before the canon of Scripture was complete, there were signs, wonders and miracles, but they ended once the canon was complete. From that time on God speaks only through His Word—the Bible.

The trouble with this point of view is that it is not warranted in Scripture at all, but is a conclusion some good and sincere theologians have drawn owing to the apparent absence of signs and wonders in the Church. Some people have hastily, but permanently, dug their heels in and have refused to acknowledge any extraordinary work of God today as authentic—since God does not do this anymore! It is quite sad. They are truly deists in evangelical dress.

The canon of Scripture is indeed closed. Nothing can be added to it. It does not follow, however, that God cannot

do miraculous things today. God enabled Elijah to speak at *oath level* although he was not a canonical prophet. What does it mean to speak at oath level? Briefly it means to speak with assurance that you have it right; it is God's final word on the subject. We will explore this at some length at the end of this chapter. There is no reason God cannot speak through someone like that today. It does not mean for a second that one is adding to Scripture. Indeed, such power and authority would extol and honor Scripture more than ever. It would demonstrate that God is indeed the *living* God.

Elijah's main point here was that his word to Ahab was as reliable as the very existence of God. Elijah's word was literally as dependable as God Himself. "If God lives, then my word is true," Elijah was saying. "If there is a God, it's not going to rain." To put it conversely, Elijah was virtually saying, "If it rains, there is no God." In other words, as surely as there is a God, one can forget about rain until Elijah gave permission for it to rain.

The God of Israel

Second, Elijah's God is connected with a people and a nation: Israel. God in His sovereign purpose chose Israel to be His people. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 7:6). He chose Israel not because they were more numerous, for they were "the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). As it is written, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,

and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Exodus 33:19; see also Romans 9:14).

Elijah, therefore, spoke for the *God of Israel* and addressed Ahab who was a king in Israel but who had forgotten God’s covenant and ways. Ahab was in a most precarious state and yet was privileged—even if he was ungrateful—to have a true word of God addressed to him.

God’s Trust in Elijah

Third, the fact that God would allow Elijah to speak to Ahab on oath-level authority shows God’s trust in this prophet. I cannot imagine a greater privilege on this planet than to speak directly for God in this fashion. This is truly to be entrusted with a “thus says the Lord.”

Frankly, I do not think God grants this every day. I personally think it is extremely rare, as it was even in Elijah’s day. It is not the same thing as expository teaching—as I am doing in writing this book. I am, therefore, not claiming to speak at oath level. Sorry if this disappoints you! One of my editors told me that he had a writer who would not allow his material to be edited. “Every word I write is from God,” the man actually claimed, and would not allow an editor to mess with his stuff! This is silly. Only a canonical writer speaks with infallibility. God *may* grant a sovereign vessel to speak at oath level, but such a person should always be open to criticism and scrutiny.

That said, I hope, as I write, that I am truly speaking for God and believe I am indeed doing this—but only to the degree I am being *faithful to the true meaning* of His Word. God is the judge of that. But to be given oath-level authority is to have the infallible, verbal command of the Spirit whereby one *knows* he is saying exactly what God wants said. Elijah had precisely that

at times, as when he told Ahab it would not rain. But he did not always have it! We will see below that this extraordinary prophet could get “in the flesh” and say things that would make the angels blush. In any case, to speak with the authority of God’s oath was an inestimable honor and privilege.

Elijah’s Allegiance

Fourth, notice the words *whom I serve*. That lets Ahab know immediately whose side Elijah was on and where he was coming from. Elijah’s sole allegiance was to the God of Israel. He *served* the God of Israel. He did what God said “Do,” went where God said “Go” and said what God said “Say.” This means that Elijah could not be bribed or persuaded to do anything or say anything but what God Himself commanded him to say or do.

The Church needs more people like that around today. Too many people have a “price”; that is, if the bid is high enough, they can be persuaded to compromise, alter their messages or leave out what might be offensive. It might come not merely with the promise of money, but perhaps with the promise of position, a promise of whom they can meet and be seen with or a promise of some favor coming down the road. It is unthinkable that the Elijahs, the John the Baptists and the apostle Pauls of this world could be tempted successfully to change their messages to suit their hearers. Paul himself said that in the last days there would be a “great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3).

The Oath: Infallibility

Finally—and most importantly—contained in Elijah’s word to Ahab is a phenomenon we must try further to understand

before we move on in this book. It is a much neglected teaching, but one that is thrilling and rewarding to the person who grasps it: the meaning and place of the oath. As we have seen, Elijah confronted Ahab with an oath: “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives.” This is “oath language.” (See Jeremiah 5:2, where the exact phrase is used in conjunction with an oath.)

In a word, *oath* means “infallibility.” It may be applied several ways. It can refer, for example, to the assurance of salvation, which the Westminster Confession declares to be “infallible assurance.” It can refer to advanced knowledge that your prayer will be answered, knowing that your prayer is “heard” (see 1 John 5:14–15). It is supernatural knowledge imparted by the Holy Spirit.

The promise and oath are “two unchangeable things,” according to Hebrews 6:18, in which it is “impossible for God to lie,” but the oath is stronger. Sometimes God makes a promise; less frequently He swears an oath. Is there a difference? Yes. Whereas both are *equally true*, the promise is usually conditional. An “if” is often indicated. “*If* my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, *then* will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14, emphasis added). This is a *promise* from God. It is absolutely true but is conditional: *If . . . then*.

Sometimes the “if” is not explicit but implied. Take John 3:16, the Bible in a nutshell: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is perhaps the best known promise in the Bible—the promise of eternal life. There is no “if” in John 3:16, but it is implied: Only those who believe shall have eternal life.

The oath, however, is typically carried out without any conditions; when God swears an oath, nothing can stop it from being fulfilled. “I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (Hebrews 3:11). Although the children of Israel tried to enter Canaan, after God swore in His wrath they failed to do so (see Numbers 14:44–45). In other words, once God has sworn an oath, there is nothing anyone can do to change His mind.

The swearing of the oath by God may be directed by Him in two ways: in wrath or in mercy. God swore in His wrath that Israel would not get their inheritance, and that generation indeed died in the wilderness (see Hebrews 3:17–19). God swore in His mercy to Abraham: “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son . . .” (Genesis 22:16). The result was that Abraham’s seed would be as innumerable as the grains of sand on the seashore and the stars in the heavens.

Initially, from Genesis 12:1 to Genesis 22, God spoke to Abraham by *promise*. God promised Abraham that his seed would be as the stars in the heavens. Abraham believed the promise and was regarded righteous by his faith (see Genesis 15:6). The promise was repeated after that until we get to Genesis 22:16, when the promise was upgraded: God now swore an *oath* to Abraham. Hebrews 6:13 notes that God “swore by himself” to Abraham because He could swear by no greater. This is because people always swear “by someone greater” (Hebrews 6:16). They do this to convince others that they are absolutely telling the truth. I have heard people say, “I swear by my mother’s grave,” in order to prove they are telling the truth or will keep their promise. The president of the United States generally takes the oath of office on the

Bible. The oath signifies absolute assurance that the truth is being told and the promise will be kept.

Elijah swore *by God* when he went before King Ahab and pronounced on oath: “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1). This was a word that could not be changed, even if the whole nation of Israel fasted and prayed for many days. Elijah did not bite his nails for the next three years, worrying that it might rain and thereby destroy his prophetic reputation. When God grants the oath all doubting disappears.

Or to quote Hebrews, the oath “puts an end to all argument” (Hebrews 6:16). It appeals to the highest authority—God Himself. One should be extremely cautious, therefore, when speaking directly for God. I am afraid there are a lot of would-be prophets around who carelessly claim “God told me” and have no idea what they are doing or saying. Elijah, however, had *truly* heard from God and knew what he was doing.

When Elijah confronted Ahab with the words *As the Lord, the God of Israel lives*, he was informing the wicked king that God Himself was at the bottom of this prophecy that there would be no rain. It was not really Elijah’s word at all; it was an infallible, direct and immediate word from God. Elijah was merely the instrument, the vehicle, that conveyed this word.

This man Elijah, who stepped in out of the blue, spoke with a level of authority that seldom appears on the earth. Only people like Moses and Samuel had spoken like this before. That is the way the life and ministry of Elijah is introduced. We now proceed to examine this extraordinary, but ordinary, man.

2

Knowing the Next Step Forward

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.” So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

1 Kings 17:2-6

The Holy Spirit always knows the next thing we should do, the next step forward. Elijah needed wisdom to know what to do now that he had confronted King Ahab. *Wisdom* may be defined as “the presence of the mind of the Holy Spirit.”

We learn later that Ahab looked high and low over Israel to find Elijah. As David spent twenty years running from King Saul to stay alive, so, too, Elijah was on the run. It was part of his being prepared for future ministry.

To be entrusted with oath-level assurance of God's will is arguably the greatest honor and privilege that a human being can receive. It is an infallible knowledge that God occasionally gives to His chosen servants. That is what happened to Elijah when he could categorically and authoritatively tell King Ahab that it would not rain unless he said so. But, at the same time, the person to whom such assurance is given is still human. I think it would be hard *not* to take oneself quite seriously, having been entrusted with such insight. We will see throughout this book that Elijah did indeed take himself very seriously. What is thrilling is how patient God was with Elijah. God knows our frame and remembers that we are "dust" (Psalm 103:14).

There was no natural explanation for what Elijah was able to convey to Ahab. Not that Ahab believed Elijah! The evil king was so filled with unbelief and the demonic that Elijah's word was, in a sense, wasted. What also was happening—which the account in 1 Kings makes no mention of—is that Elijah not only prophesied but *prayed*. It is James who tells us that Elijah "prayed earnestly that it would not rain" (James 5:17). The prayer no doubt preceded Elijah's solemn declaration to Ahab. You may ask, Was it God's idea or Elijah's that it would not rain? It was both, but the idea began with God. God put the thought in Elijah's heart. Elijah then asked God that it would not rain—as though it was entirely Elijah's idea. But he would not have known to make such a request had not God put it in his heart.

We saw above that one of the ways the oath may be applied is by having advance knowledge that one's prayer will be answered. John said, "If *we know that he hears us*—whatever we ask—*we know that we have* what we asked of him" (1 John 5:15, emphasis added). Elijah *knew that he was heard*; he went, therefore, to Ahab with the absolute knowledge that what he prophesied would come to pass.

Preparation

It may surprise you when I say that this kind of authority and power meant that Elijah would need further preparation. This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life: We need more and more preparation when we have more and more of the Holy Spirit. One might think that if we are full of the Holy Spirit, surely that is all the preparation we need. Wrong! We need preparation more than ever! It is partly because of the human tendency in all of us to take ourselves too seriously when we are given more and more success.

When Samuel anointed David to be king, "from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13). But it would be another twenty years before David would be king. Why? It is because—strange as it may seem—being Spirit-filled is not enough. David's anointing would need to be *refined*. He was only seventeen years old. He was not ready to be king!

It takes a lot of maturity to admit to the need of preparation. Age helps us to come to our senses. Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers of all time, said that if he knew he had 25 years left to live he would spend twenty of them in preparation. Billy Graham said much the same thing, that

if he had his life to live over, he would spend more time in preparation.

But God also has a way of doing on-the-job preparation. He did this with Elijah. Elijah's greatest work lay in the future, when one day he would confront the false prophets of Baal. This would take place while the famine was still on, before the rain came—when Ahab had no choice but to listen to Elijah. Three years without rain got Ahab's attention.

The three years after Elijah's edict to Ahab were the era of preparation for Elijah. Those years were as vital to Elijah's development as they were crucial for bringing Ahab to openness regarding Elijah.

Are you in preparation? Perhaps you are Spirit-filled. Could it be that you are not ready—even yet—for the greatest job God has in mind for you? Whom the Lord loves He chastens—disciplines—and He “punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:6). This punishment is not a case of God “getting even” with us owing to some terrible sin in our past. No, it is God getting us ready for what is coming. Chastening is essentially preparation. It enables us to share in God's holiness (see Hebrews 12:10), thus producing “a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (verse 11). The more God uses you, the more you will need preparation. I can tell you candidly, at the age of 76 I am still being prepared.

Elijah needed more preparation. After he left the presence of Israel's king, he was ordered to turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine where he would drink from the brook and be fed by the ravens. I have seen what is said to be the Kerith Ravine in Israel. The first thing you notice is that it would indeed be a good place to hide. There is almost no way King Ahab could find Elijah in such an area.

Why Is This Important?

God has a plan for your life. His idea for your future is a thousand times better and greater than anything you could come up with on your own. God loves you with an everlasting love (see Jeremiah 31:3); He wants only what is best for you. He will withhold no good thing from you when you seek to do His will above all else (see Psalm 84:11). You may or may not be another Elijah, but God will go to the same pains in preparing you for what He has in mind for you as He did for Elijah.

One's visible profile in the Kingdom of God does not determine the extent of God's love. Not all of us can be Elijahs, but all of us are loved and cared for as much as Elijah. The niche that God has determined for each of us requires preparation so that we will be ready when our ultimate moment comes. Jesus tasted death for every person (see Hebrews 2:9). Moreover, God honors His Son's blood to the hilt, but only when it is embraced by the person who believes. The moment you affirm and embrace the blood of Jesus is when you can be sure that God is on your side.

How do you do this? You must abandon *all* hope in your good works and personal righteousness that you thought would get you to heaven when you die. You then transfer the trust you had in yourself to what Jesus did for you on the cross. You trust His blood—alone. It is then you not only have assurance that you will go to heaven when you die but also know that God is working on your case now.

You and I need to know the next step forward when it comes to God's plan for us. He does not reveal the totality of that plan from *A* to *Z*. He leads us from *A* to *B*, from *B* to *C*, etc. Don't ask, What is *Z*? Ask, What is *B*? The next step for Elijah was not to head for Mount Carmel, but to head

eastward, cross over the Jordan River and settle in the Kerith Ravine. It would be his next home for a while. Wisdom is having the presence of the mind of the Holy Spirit, which also means knowing the next thing to do.

Elijah's Preservation

Elijah's new home in the Kerith Ravine was not only for his preparation but equally for his protection and preservation. King Ahab would spend the next few years trying to find him. Elijah's word had so infuriated the king—and so threatened him—that Elijah became Public Enemy No. 1, insofar as Ahab was concerned. Had Ahab been right with God, he would have welcomed Elijah's word. Instead of wanting to destroy him, the king should have fallen on his knees and thanked God that there was a prophet in Israel.

Is it not amazing how people want to shoot the messenger when that messenger does not bring good news? Elijah was only relaying the message that was best for Israel. Behind Elijah's prayer that it would not rain was his burden for Israel. He loved his nation. He hated seeing it being taken over by false prophets—evil men who despised God's covenant. Elijah had one goal: to rid Israel of these men. He reckoned that to pray that it might not rain would eventually lead to the confrontation on Mount Carmel, which we will examine later in this book.

God ordered that Elijah be kept in hiding for a long while. There are two kinds of hiding. The first is when someone is running from God. Jonah tried this. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and Jonah foolishly tried to run from God. The truth is, one cannot really run from God. As the psalmist put it, "If I make my bed in the depths [Hebrew, *sheol*], you are

there” (Psalm 139:8). God is everywhere. So while you may *try* to run from God, you will not succeed.

Some people refuse to confess Christ openly lest they bear the reproach of being a true Christian. They choose to remain in hiding. Jesus said that if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us (see Mark 8:38). He said that if we will confess Him before men, He will confess us before the Father (see Matthew 10:32). I lovingly urge you, dear reader, to come out of hiding and accept the stigma, the shame and the reproach. Do it now.

The second kind of hiding is when you are hiding from an enemy who is determined to destroy you. This was Elijah’s kind. God was on Elijah’s side, and gave specific orders to Elijah to head eastward and settle in at the Kerith Ravine. If someone is out to destroy you, listen carefully to the Holy Spirit. He will show you the next step forward. He will protect you, He will preserve you.

If someone is out to get you—not to do bodily harm to you but to hurt your reputation—God has shown the next step forward for you: Do nothing. “Do not take revenge, . . . for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19; see also Deuteronomy 32:35). Let God do the vindicating. Don’t deprive God of doing what He does best—to vindicate! If you want to be a fool, try vindicating yourself. God will protect you, preserve you—that is, if you will let Him! God put Elijah in a situation whereby the prophet had no choice but to wait on God.

God sent Elijah to the Kerith Ravine not only to protect him from Ahab but also to preserve him. He needed to develop spiritually and emotionally. He needed to be out of the battle for a while. Confronting a king is no small thing. As soon as Elijah spoke as he did to Ahab, he took off!

We will see this pattern again in Elijah's life. Protection from an evil king is one thing; being preserved so that one can develop spiritually is another. Elijah needed both—these being part of his preparation. This would require patience. “Ye have need of patience,” the writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 10:36, KJV). Don't we all? Elijah would learn to move one step at a time over the next few years.

Elijah's Provisions

There is more. Elijah would need to be provided for. He would need food and water. He was told to go eastward to the Kerith Ravine: “You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there” (1 Kings 17:4). This does not sound like dining at a “Five Star” restaurant, but when there is an impending famine and you are running for your life, having *any* food and water will do nicely! This also shows God's sovereign control over nature: “I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.” That seems like pretty good security to me. When God is working on your behalf, relax. Wait. Watch. You have nothing to worry about.

Never, never, never underestimate how God will supply your need. “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14). He has ways of supplying your need that you never have dreamed of.

I can never forget the autumn of 1963 when Louise and I lived in Carlisle, Ohio. The little church there, of which I was the pastor, rejected my ministry; they stopped their giving and did all they could to get us to leave. It worked, though we struggled for a while before we finally resigned. Ultimately, the treasurer had to say, “There is no money to pay you this

week.” We woke up the next morning devastated. But in that day’s mail we received a check for \$25.00—just in the nick of time! The day before in a town three hundred miles away an old friend had said to her husband, “I believe we should send R. T. and Louise a check for \$25.00.” I did not even think this couple knew where we lived! That check meant the world to us. It taught me that God has a way of supplying our needs that we could not have predicted.

“I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.” It is interesting to compare this word to Leviticus 11:13–15: “These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, the red kite, any kind of black kite, any kind of raven.” So think of this: God used ravens to feed Elijah. It is not that Elijah *ate* ravens, but that the ravens were used to bring him food. The ravens would fly into places where there was meat, corn and grain. With God nothing is impossible.

Living in Solitude

Whatever would Elijah do with his time in this ravine east of the Jordan River? All he could do, it would seem, was to drink from the brook and wait for the ravens to bring him food. But what an encouragement to watch this happen morning and evening, morning and evening—ravens coming with more food!

But there is more. Perhaps never again would Elijah have such an opportunity to be utterly *alone*. What do you do when you are alone? By yourself? In solitude? With nothing to do? You pray. And pray. And pray. For all I know, Elijah would never again have these days when there was nothing to do but pray. A person who is highly gifted needs to pray

more than anyone. You develop intimacy with your heavenly Father. You develop sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. You get to know God's *ways*. You and I are required to know essentially two things: God's Word and His ways. You know His Word by reading the Bible. You know His ways by spending time with Him.

How much do you pray? When you stand before God at the Judgment Seat of Christ you may have many regrets over how you spent your time, but you will have no regrets over any amount of time you spent in prayer. There will be no praying in heaven. Take advantage of every opportunity to pray—now.

Walking in Obedience

“So he did what the LORD had told him” (1 Kings 17:5). Obedience. That is the secret: Doing what God tells you to do. Nothing more; just *do it*. “He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.” He *stayed there*. You do not move until God says to move. You stay there. It is the way the children of Israel were guided in the wilderness: “Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted” (Exodus 40:36–37).

How do you know what God is saying? First, you get your instructions from Scripture. Elijah did not have the Bible as we have, but he had the Mosaic Law. He was well-versed in the covenant relationship between God and the children of Israel. When a person is immersed in the Word of God, he will have a fairly shrewd idea of how to live. Second, you listen to the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Note the order: the Scriptures first, the impulse second. You are

very likely not going to hear God speak to you if you bypass His Word. It is required that you know His Word *so well* that the impulse of the Spirit often merely heightens the knowledge of the Word.

When you are devoted to the Word of God—being fully determined to follow it—God will honor you with the impulse of the Spirit. He begins with Holy Scripture, which He wrote. Never forget that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible (see 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). To get on good terms with the Holy Spirit, you need to extol and embrace the Holy Spirit’s greatest product—the Bible. You honor the Holy Spirit when you honor the Bible.

An example of the impulse of the Holy Spirit is when Philip heard God speak to him: “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26). Philip obeyed. Soon he noticed a man in a chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah. “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’” (verse 29). The eventual consequence of this was the conversion of the man in the chariot.

Philip knew his Bible. The proof: He was able to explain Isaiah 53, which the man in the chariot was reading. In other words, here was a man who knew his Bible backward and forward, and here was a man who obeyed the impulse of the Holy Spirit. God still does this today. God honors men and women with the impulse of His Spirit when they have taken the time to know the Bible.

People ask, Why do I need teaching? Why do I need to read the Bible? I reply: Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would “remind” us of what we have already learned in our hearts (John 14:26). It is not enough to want to be Spirit-filled so you can know the Spirit’s impulse. You need to have something in your *mind* that the Holy Spirit can remind you of.

If you are empty-headed before you are Spirit-filled you will be empty-headed afterward! The Holy Spirit brings to your remembrance only the Word that is already there. How did it get there? By diligent, patient and consistent reading of the Bible.

I think a lot of people, especially young Christians, want the impulse of the Spirit but do not know their Bibles. They say they have no time to read the Bible. I tell them: The more you know the Bible, the more you will have the impulse of the Spirit. The less you know the Bible, the less you can expect the impulse of the Spirit. This is because the impulse of the Holy Spirit will always be in accordance with Scripture. God will never give you an impulse that is contrary to what the Holy Spirit has already written in the Bible.

How to Know the Next Step Forward

So how do you know the next step forward? First, you obey immediately what God says initially. *Accept* what He says with delight. “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4).

Second, avoid no detail. God said, “Turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan” (1 Kings 17:3). So he went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You do even the least thing He requires. Jesus said that he who is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much (see Luke 16:10).

Third, allow for no delay. Obey His instructions at once. “So he did what the LORD had told him.” There was no waiting.

The God of Elijah is faithful and true; He always keeps His word. Elijah was told to go eastward to the Kerith Ravine to drink of the brook and be fed by the ravens by God's orders. So it followed (surprise, surprise): "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook" (1 Kings 17:6).