

# Session 1: As It Was in the Days of Elijah

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## I. Introduction

a) Welcome to the class, *Understanding the Forerunner Call*. The purpose of this class is to help those who desire to be used as forerunners to understand, gain insight, and prepare for this very important call. We believe that there is tremendous urgency in this hour of history to raise up a forerunner generation to make a people ready for the Lord and to stand firm against the powers that oppose the church making herself ready.

b) The two foundational scriptures that we will draw from in this class are:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6, NKJV).

c) And,

And he [John the Baptist] will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Lk. 1:16-17).

d) Both passages speak of forerunners who operate in the spirit and power of Elijah, and both lay a foundation for the forerunner call of today. We will analyze these passages in the next three sessions, and throughout the class we will draw from the lives of Elijah, John the Baptist, and Elisha to help us grasp what the forerunner call involves. As we proceed through the class, we will explain the scriptural basis for the forerunner call, illustrate the journey of preparation that forerunners must undergo, emphasize the importance of being empowered by the spirit and power of Elijah, and identify several key functions of the call.

e) In this session, we want to look at the spiritual condition in the land during the days of Elijah, John the Baptist, and today to lay a foundation for why forerunners are needed now. Let's begin by looking at the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, King Jeroboam, because it was sin initiated during his reign that ultimately led to the arising of Elijah.

## II. The Sins of Jeroboam

1. Elijah appeared suddenly on the scene when sin had arisen to the point that the sins of Jeroboam seemed almost trivial in comparison.

a) Elijah ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of king Ahab and queen Jezebel. The following scripture states this about Ahab,

Now Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel...Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been *a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam...*" (1 Kings 16:29-31).

b) Immediately following this passage, we read this about Ahab,

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... he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him (1 Kings 16:31-33).

- c) It was in the context of great compromise in the religion of the day and tremendous evil in the nation that the scriptures declare, “Now Elijah” (1 Kings 17:1). God had had enough and raised up Elijah to declare judgment on the land and to call the people back to the one true God.
- d) Since the sins of Jeroboam were one of the primary causes of God raising up Elijah and also a major reason for the raising up of forerunners in our day, we want to find out what were the sins of Jeroboam. Let’s look at the reign of Jeroboam to discover what sins he initiated in Israel.

## 2. Following the reign of King Solomon, Israel was divided.

- a) After King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king over the still united kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam, who had served under Solomon, had attempted a rebellion against Solomon and, when discovered, fled to Egypt to escape Solomon’s retaliation. When Solomon died, Jeroboam returned to Israel. He and a group of supporters went to Rehoboam asking for relief from the hard labor required by Solomon. Rehoboam rejected their request and, as a result, Israel divided.
- b) The southern kingdom of Judah was home to the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the base for the priesthood. Over the history of the divided kingdom, the southern kingdom vacillated between kings who offered their allegiance to God and evil kings who led the people into apostasy until they finally were taken captive by Babylon in 586 BC. Unlike the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom from the time of its division from Judah until it went into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC almost never had a king whose heart followed after the Lord.

## 3. Jeroboam committed grave sins against the Lord.

- a) Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Observing the biblical account of Jeroboam, we note the sins he committed, that is, *the sins of Jeroboam*. In a general sense, Jeroboam led Israel astray from the true worship of Yahweh to form a perverted, compromised worship of the Lord based on convenience and self-promotion. Jeroboam feared that if the people went to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, they would drift away, revolt and remove him as king (1 Kings 12:28). Therefore, he established his own set of religious practices. He instituted the worship of golden calves, built pagan houses of worship on the high places, and created a priesthood from those not of the sons of Levi. In addition, he established convenient places to offer sacrifices other than the Jerusalem temple in both Bethel and Dan and created his own feast days rather than celebrating the feast days established in the scriptures by the Lord (1 Kings 12:25-33).
- b) In essence, Jeroboam acted in fear and self promotion. He feared losing people, prominence, power, and money. By placing himself above the Lord and His ways, he created a false religious system rooted in compromise rather than true biblical principles. He did not want people to travel to Jerusalem to the temple; therefore, he established a worship system of convenience rather than sacrifice. He raised up a priesthood that did not meet the criteria called for by God. He built houses of worship centered in the worship of a false representation of God. All in all, he created his own compromised religious system—all to keep the people from the scattering and abandoning him so

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as to promote and protect his own position and honor. Jeroboam's sin continued and even increased in Israel throughout subsequent generations until ultimately culminating with the rule of Ahab. To be clear, the system he created still worshiped Yahweh even though it was corrupted and compromised.

- c) Now that we have a glimpse at the sins of Jeroboam, let's see how Ahab and Jezebel took the sins of Jeroboam to an entirely different level.

## III. The Rule of Ahab and Jezebel

### 1. The reign of Ahab and Jezebel led Israel into great depths of corruption and depravity.

- a) Ahab was one of the strongest and at the same time one of the weakest kings of Israel. Faced with the same traditional enemies of the kingdom with which his predecessors had dealt, Ahab attempted to expand and strengthen his kingdom by engaging in political alliances. In the days of Ahab's predecessors, Israel had a strong economic bond with the Phoenicians. Ahab recognized the advantages of such an alliance and renewed these alliances by his marriage of political convenience to Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre. Even though Ahab bowed to Jezebel's witchcraft and harlotry, he was in many ways an effective political leader. In partnership with his wife, Jezebel, they sought to expand the kingdom and to have the luxuries that typically accompany power.

### 2. In their lust for power, they acted corruptly.

- a) We observe Ahab and Jezebel's corrupt character as they took Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Naboth owned a vineyard next to Ahab's palace. Ahab wanted it for a vegetable garden, and offered to buy it from Naboth. Naboth refused because it was part of his inheritance from the Lord. He was forbidden by the Law to sell his inheritance because the land was to pass from one generation to the next. Depressed about the issue, Ahab told Jezebel. She replied, "Do you now reign over Israel? ....I will give you the vineyard"( 1 Kings 21:7). Jezebel then initiated a plan to have Naboth falsely accused and killed so that Ahab could have his vineyard. It worked as Naboth was stoned to death and Ahab took possession of his vineyard.

- b) Ahab and Jezebel's lust for power was energized by lies, trickery, and deceit. It is written of Ahab,

Surely there was no one like Ahab who *sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD*, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel (1 Kings 21:25-26).

### 3. Ahab and Jezebel led Israel into great religious compromise, even pagan worship.

- a) Prior to the reign of Ahab, the northern kingdom had included the worship of golden calves in their religious expression. Jeroboam set up the golden calves as part of a widespread custom of the day of invisible deities riding on the backs of animals as symbols of the strength and creative power of

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Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> Including golden calves in worship continued with every king of the northern kingdom until Ahab.

- b) It is important to understand the distinction between worship with golden calves and Baal and Asherah worship. As we quoted earlier, this is stated about Ahab, "It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him [*Ahab*] to walk in the sins of Jeroboam [*which included the worship with golden calves*] ..." (1 Kings 16:31).
- c) Jeroboam took advantage of the tendency of the Jewish people to turn to idols, and the desire of most people for a religion that was convenient, not too costly, and comfortable. Jeroboam didn't tell the people to forget Jehovah but to worship Him in a new form that included golden calves.<sup>2</sup> Said differently, Jeroboam did not institute the worship of totally pagan gods. Rather, he instituted a perverted and compromised form of worship of the God of Israel.
- d) Even though this was evil in the sight of God, Jeroboam's sin was to institute a false worship of Yahweh. Much worse, Ahab and Jezebel took false worship to an entirely new level. Ahab gave superficial allegiance to Yahweh by naming his children to honor God. The names of his children were Ahaziah ("Yah holds"), Jehoram ("Yah is high"), and Athaliah ("Yah is strong").
- e) At the same time, he and Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal and the Asherah into Israel as the official religion of the state. Baal and Asherah worship were far worse than the worship of the golden calves. In the worship of Baal, metal images of Baal were forged and fires started in their bellies. Baals' fiery bellies became the place that human sacrifices were offered to the pagan idols. Read what David Davis wrote in his book, *The Elijah Legacy*,

Fires would be stoked in the open bellies of the metal idols. The priests of Baal would then take the first-born sons from Israelite women and throw the infants into the fire in the stomach of the idol. As the mother screamed in horror, the false prophets of Baal would dance, shriek, bang on musical instruments, cut themselves with knives and cry out to their god. These altars to Baal were built on the "high places" of Galilee. Alongside child sacrifice, organized ritual prostitution and homosexuality were sanctioned and encouraged. Asherim, fertility poles, were set up in homage to Asherah, the wife of Baal in Canaanite mythology.<sup>3</sup>

- f) Baal and Asherah worship were extremely evil, in direct opposition to the worship of Yahweh, and through Ahab and Jezebel, it became the official religion of the land. Baal and Asherah worship were filled with elements of witchcraft and harlotry. The 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19) prophesied, although from the demonic realm; they pierced and cut themselves as a way of self-flagellation in order to appease and call forth the blessing of their demonic gods (1 Kings 18:28); and they sought the counsel of the vowed enemy to Israel's one true God.
- g) The worship of Baal and Asherah became the governmentally preferred religion of the land. Ahab built a temple for Baal, placed an altar in it and actively worshiped Baal himself. He had moved from religious compromise to outright pagan worship. Not only did they institute Baal and Asherah worship as the official state religion, they attempted to eradicate the worship of Yahweh from the land. This is written about Jezebel, "for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and

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water” (1 Kings 18:4). In other words, the worship of Yahweh was opposed, made illegal, and persecuted by Jezebel and Ahab.

## 4. Through the sensuality of Jezebel and the prevalence of pagan worship, immorality characterized the culture.

- a) Baal and Asherah worship included gross acts of ritual prostitution and homosexuality. Although Asherah was believed to be Baal’s mother, she was also his mistress. The worshipers of these two gods believed they could influence the gods’ actions by performing the behavior they wished the gods to demonstrate. Believing the sexual union of Baal and Asherah produced fertility, their worshipers engaged in immoral sex to cause the gods to join together, ensuring good harvests. This practice became the basis for religious prostitution (1 Kings 14:23-24). The priest or a male member of the community represented Baal. The priestess or a female member of the community represented Asherah.<sup>4</sup>
- b) One more brief example of Jezebel’s harlotries. When Jehu was coming to Jezreel to kill Jezebel as had been prophesied, Jezebel heard of it and it is written of her that she “painted her eyes, adorned her head, and looked out the window” (2 Kings 9:30) with every thought of seducing Jehu in order to save her life. Baal and Asherah worship had many elements that were seductive to the Hebrew people. As is said of Jezebel, "What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" (2 Kings 9:22). The licentiousness character of the worship of Asherah had a subtle attraction for the Hebrews who were called to serve a holy God under the rigid moral code of the law.
- c) Therefore, we see that during their reign as king and queen—that is, the government—they sanctioned immorality and murder. Their making these pagan gods the official state religion led the people far from God and deep into pagan worship.

## 5. Ahab and Jezebel greatly opposed and persecuted the true worship of the Lord.

- a) Jezebel attempted to completely eliminate the worship of Yahweh from the land.<sup>5</sup> Because of her complete devotion to the worship of the Asherah, at her instigation the altars of the Lord were torn down and she inaugurated a great religious persecution in the land, killing off many of the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:4). Whereas Ahab elevated Baal worship to an equal place with the worship of the one true God, Jezebel aimed at more than a union of the two religions. She planned to destroy the religion of God totally and put that of Baal and Asherah in its place.
- b) Because of this objective, Ahab and Jezebel opposed the servants and things of God. When Elijah came to confront Ahab, Ahab called him a troubler of Israel saying, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah responded by calling on Ahab to gather the prophets of Baal and of Asherah (1 Kings 18:18-19). Ahab responded to Elijah’s demand to gather the people of Israel together for the confrontation with Baal and Asherah. But, even in so doing, he was not submitting in obedience to the prophet’s command, he saw the encounter as a means to establish Baal worship more fully in the land and at the same time publicly embarrass Elijah.
- c) There was also widespread persecution of God’s leaders and those trying to follow the Lord with all their hearts. In the instance mentioned previously of Jezebel stealing Naboth’s vineyard and having

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him killed (1 Kings 21:1-16), we see in the lives of Ahab and Jezebel a total disregard for the Old Testament law of the day. When asked for the vineyard, Naboth's response was as follows, "But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers'" (1 Kings 21:3). Naboth was not using the name of the Lord lightly in his response; rather, he was drawing from the law of the land in that day. The law read, "Thus no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (Num. 36:7).

- d) In addition, we see persecution of God's people in the example of Obadiah. Obadiah had to hide 100 prophets of God in a cave and feed them bread and water because Jezebel had destroyed many of the true prophets of the Lord and wanted to destroy them all (1 Kings 18:4). A few verses later we read that Obadiah was in great fear of telling Ahab that Elijah was there to see him, saying that Ahab would kill him (1 Kings 18:14).
- e) In another example, following Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal, Jezebel vowed to kill him. Jezebel's message to Elijah read, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (1 Kings 19:2).

## 6. The condition in the land caused God's people to remain silent and in compromise.

- a) Note this passage,

Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." *But the people did not answer him a word.* Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men" (1 Kings 18:21-22).

- b) You can imagine what Elijah must have thought. Ahab and Jezebel had gathered 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of prophets of Asherah—850 demonically inspired prophetic ministers against him. And all the people—those who were supposed to stand with him remained silent. They did not utter an "amen" or shout a word of encouragement. Maybe it was fear. Maybe it was apathy. Maybe it was unbelief. Whatever the reason, some mocked but the rest remained silent in the midst of this confrontation. It was not until Elijah had ministered did the people turn back to God.
- c) Now that we have a glimpse of the condition of the land during the days of Elijah, let's see that similar conditions existed during the ministry of John the Baptist.

## IV. In the Days of John the Baptist

### 1. John the Baptist who operated in the spirit and power of Elijah faced many of the same issues as Elijah did in his day.

- a) Just like in the days of Elijah, John the Baptist ministered in a time of religious error, governmental opposition, and moral compromise. As the gospel of Matthew records, John was a voice crying out from the wilderness to the religious establishment calling on them to repent, turn back to God and

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His ways (Mt. 3:1-3), and to make themselves ready for the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry (Lk. 1:16-17). Many received his message coming out to be baptized and made ready to receive Jesus.

- b) Even though he was very successful in many ways, he experienced considerable opposition from the religious community of his day. Characteristic of the state of the religious community, when some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to him, he referred to them as a "brood of vipers" (Mt. 3:7). In a way similar to Elijah, John confronted the religious compromise in his day.
- c) Just like Elijah faced resistance from the government ruled by Ahab and Jezebel, John also faced governmental opposition and persecution. During the days of John's ministry, Rome ruled Israel. Under Roman rule, the practice of Judaism for the most part was protected by Roman law. However, imperially appointed magistrates had unlimited authority outside Roman law with regard to religion so that they could act as they chose against the messengers and message of Christ.<sup>6</sup> We see the "outside the law" right exercised by Herod against John when Herodias asked for his head and Herod had John beheaded (Mt. 14:3-12). John was martyred by Herod because of his bold voice calling Herod to repentance.
- d) In addition to the governmental opposition and persecution John faced, the pervading Roman culture in which he ministered was pagan. The Roman empire celebrated the imperial worship of the emperors. Emperor worship permeated all sectors of society including businesses, guild members, and religious establishments. In varying degrees, the worship associated with the pagan worship within the Roman Empire was pagan, polytheistic, and morally corrupt. During John's day, many men and women were forced into worship of pagan gods and their associated perverted worship in order to keep a job, earn a living, and be accepted in social circles or the public arena.
- e) Therefore, just as it was in the days of Elijah, John the Baptist ministered in an environment of religious error and compromise, governmental opposition and persecution, and a morally corrupt culture.

## V. Present Day Environment

### 1. Today we face a spiritual environment similar to what Elijah and John the Baptist faced.

- a) The reason for sharing about the days in which Elijah and John ministered is to establish the fact that our day is not much different than theirs. We face many of the same issues they faced, and just as they needed the anointing on Elijah's life, we need the spirit and power of Elijah. Worldwide, governments are filled with lust for power, lies, trickery, and deceit. The global culture is morally bankrupt and getting worse by the year. There is also an increasing resistance and a rapidly growing persecution of true Christianity. There are many similarities between the political climate under Ahab and Jezebel, the Roman Empire and today's global political system. For the most part, leaders are out for self. They lust for power, and they participate in lies, deceit and trickery to get it.
- b) Accompanying the corruption that characterizes our governments is the moral corruption of the culture. People today do not go to the temples of Baal and Asherah to worship, but the practice of Baal and Asherah worship have many similarities to the lifestyle of many today. Immorality, sexual perversion and child sacrifice through abortion are even more rampant today than during the days

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of Elijah. At the same time, false religions are on the rise and the church is in great compromise in an attempt to reach an apathetic culture.

- c) While all this is happening, the people of God are being mocked at every opportunity by TV and newspaper personalities and governmental leaders. The church is being resisted and opposed, and there are systematic efforts at all levels of government and society to push Christ out of every dimension of culture and public life.
- d) In summary, globally the governments of the world are attempting to remove the worship of Christ totally from the nations and even to make it illegal while instituting a false global religion in its place. At the same time this is happening, the global church is in great compromise worshipping with its own form of golden calves of compromise, convenience and self-promotion.
- e) Fortunately, in the west, Christians are not being persecuted physically, but in some places in the world this is happening now. There is no doubt about it, we are living in days similar to the days during which Elijah and John ministered. There is most definitely a need for an Elijah company to arise once again to confront these issues and to call the church back to the Person of Christ.
- f) As great as the need is now, the need will only become greater as we approach the second coming of Christ. Even though Ahab and Jezebel were real people who led Israel into these real events, they also foreshadow the coming of the antichrist and the great harlot described in the Book of Revelation. We are living in the days of Ahab and John the Baptist now. God's solution is to raise up a forerunner company of believers anointed with the spirit and power of Elijah to awaken and make ready a people prepared for Christ and to stand strong against the forces that would oppose people being made ready.
- g) It is time once again for those empowered as forerunners in the spirit and power of Elijah to confront these issues and the entities behind them, to announce the second coming of Christ, and to turn the hearts of the people back to the one true God.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeroboam, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 12:28, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament*, 2001-2004 by Warren W. Wiersbe. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, p10-11

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.followtherabbi.com/Brix?pageID=2725>

<sup>5</sup> Ahab, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft

<sup>6</sup> W. Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles*, Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018, p. 40.