

INTRODUCTION:

The name Elijah means “Yahweh is God.” Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets. The story of Elijah’s life and ministry is found in 1 Kings 17:1 through 2 Kings 2:18. He was a Tishbite, having been born perhaps at Tishbe in Galilee; but he dwelt in Gilead (1 Kings 17:1). He wore a garment of skin or of coarse camel’s hair, which was girt about his loins with a leather girdle (22 Kings 1:8; 1 Kings 19:13). When Ahab, influenced by his wife Jezebel, had given himself to the worship of the Tyrian god Baal, Elijah suddenly appeared upon the scene. He presented himself before the erring king, and predicted a drought of indefinite duration as a penalty for the rejection of Yahweh. Elijah’s central message was to call us to worship the Lord God rather than false gods. Elijah was the only prophet to be taken to heaven without dying and Scripture attest that he will return to herald the coming of the Messiah.

GOD PROVIDES:

When the people rebelled against God, He used Elijah to declare the beginning of a three year drought which caused a famine. On account of the famine and at God’s command Elijah retired first to the brook Cherith, where God sent ravens with food to feed him. When the brook became dry, again at God’s command, he went to Zarephath on the coast of the Mediterranean, north of Tyre. A widow trusted God and shared her last cake with Elijah. God then saw to it that her jar of meal and jar of oil did not fail until the famine ended. When her son died he was restored to life at the prayer of Elijah (1 Kings 17).

GOD PROVEN SUPERIOR TO BAAL:

After many days in the third year (1 Kings 18:1), Elijah was directed to show himself to king Ahab. Then followed a great miracle at Mt. Carmel. First, the priests of Baal endeavored to secure evidence of Baal’s divinity, but failed. Then Elijah gathered the people about an ancient altar of the Lord; he repaired it, taking 12 stones for the purpose, thus silently testifying that the division of the 12 tribes into two kingdoms was not God’s will. To obviate every possibility of fraud, he made the people drench the sacrifice and the altar with water. Then he cried to the Lord and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and destroyed the altar. God had attested His existence and His power. Baal’s prophets, proven to be impostors, were taken down to the brook Kishon, at the foot of the mountain, and slain at Elijah’s bidding (1 Kings 18:1-40; Deut. 17:2-5;

13:13-16). The people had acknowledged God and obeyed His prophet, and the token of God’s returning favor was seen in the gathering clouds of rain. To honor the king as ruler of a realm now professed the kingdom of God, Elijah girded up his loins and ran before the chariot of Ahab to the gate of Jezreel (1 Kings 18:41-46). But Jezebel, furious at the destruction of her prophets, vowed the death of Elijah, causing him to flee to Mt. Horeb.

ELIJAH ON MT. HOREB:

There, like Moses, Elijah was divinely sustained for 40 days and nights (Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 18; 1 Kings 19:8); a similar incident in the life of Jesus (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2). While Elijah is in a cave the Lord passes by and a great wind breaks rocks, an earthquake shakes the mountain, and a fire scorches, but God is in none of these. Rather, God is heard in a gentle blowing, whisper or small voice. Elijah was rebuked, sent back to anoint Hazael as king of Syria and Jehu as king of Israel, that they might be the scourge of God to idolatrous Israel. Elijah was also instructed to pass his mantle to Elisha as his successor. Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha, calling him to the work, and entrusted to him the further execution of the commission (1 Kings 19).

JUDGMENT PROCLAIMED AND REALIZED:

When Jezebel had Naboth judicially murdered in order to obtain his vineyard for Ahab, Elijah met the king in the coveted plot of ground and proclaimed Yahweh’s vengeance for the crime (1 Kings 21). The death of Ahab in the battle of Ramoth-gilead was the beginning of the judgment that Elijah had uttered against the royal house (1 Kings 22:1-40). When Ahab’s son and successor, Ahaziah, injured by a fall through a window, sent messengers to the idol temple at Ekron to ask whether he would recover, Elijah stopped them and turned them back. And twice when a captain with 50 men was sent apparently to arrest him, he called fire from the sky which consumed them. The third captain begged for his life, and Elijah went with him to the king (2 Kings 1:1-16).

ELIJAH TAKEN TO HEAVEN:

Finally the prophet obtained the honor, bestowed before only on Enoch (Gen. 5:24), of being translated to heaven without dying. A chariot and horses of fire appeared to him when he had gone with his attendant Elisha to the east of the Jordan. Then Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven (2 Kings 2:1-12). At that moment Elisha exclaimed: *“My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!”* In these words he

addressed Elijah as his religious teacher and at the same time recognized that he was worth a whole fighting contingent to Israel.

ELIJAH TO PRECEDE THE MESSIAH:

The last two verses of the Old Testament predict that God will send Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5-6). The New Testament explains that the reference is to John the Baptists, who was like the Tishbite in humble dress and appearance (Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6), in fidelity and in work (Matt. 11:11-14; 17:10-12; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17).

There are those, however, who contend that while John appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah, the Old Testament prophet is yet to come, in person, before the Second Advent of Christ. Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration as the representative of the Old Testament prophecy to do honor to Jesus (Matt. 17:4; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30); and Elijah's ascension, to which there was nothing analogous in the history of John the Baptist, doubtless foreshadowed that of our risen Lord.

ELIJAH'S MINISTRY FOCUS:

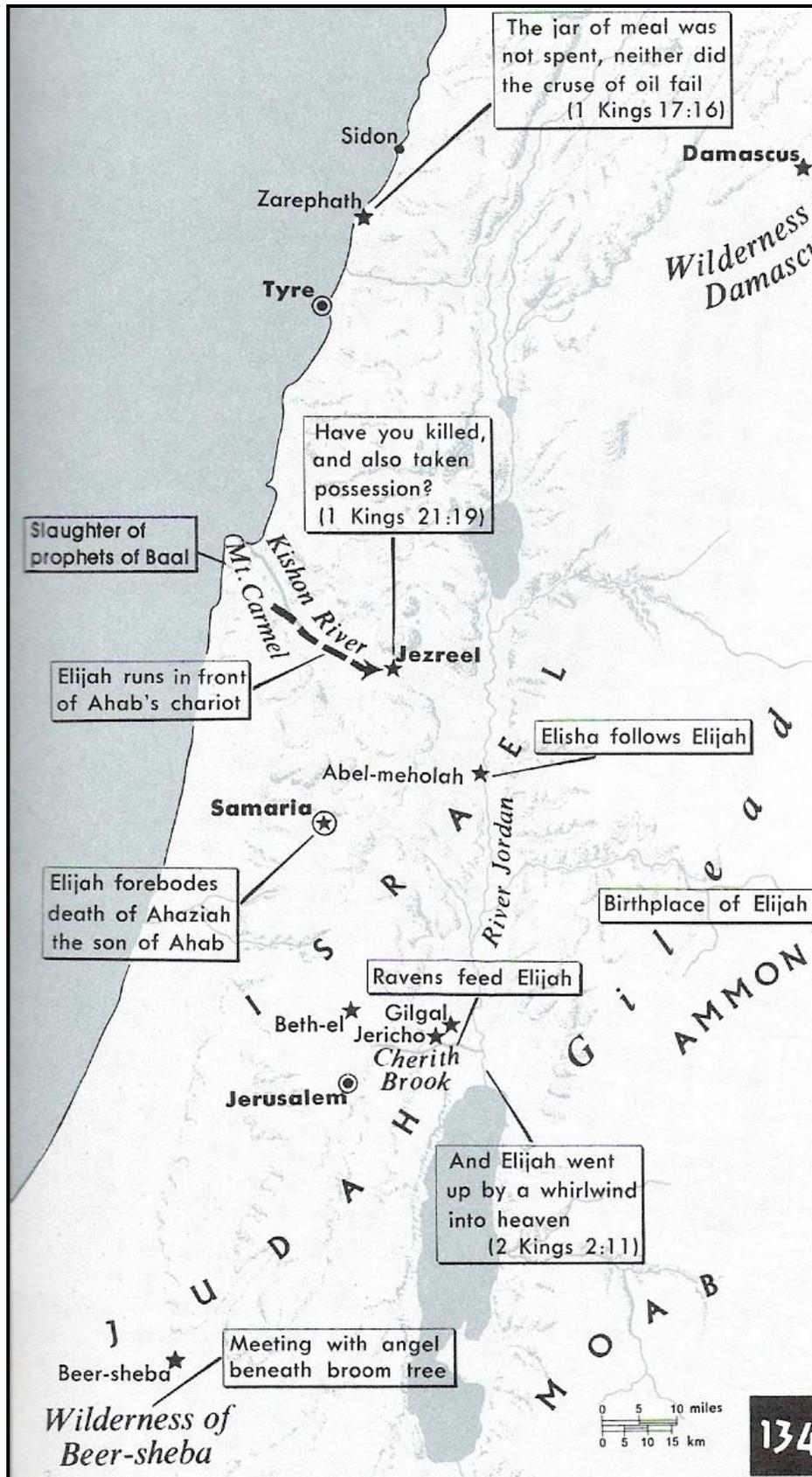
The ministry of Elijah belongs to the period of the life-and-death struggle between the religion of Yahweh and Baal worship, when the adherence of the people of northern Israel to the faith of their fathers was at issue, and all other questions regarding religious observances sank to minor importance. Elijah's central teaching was that Yahweh, not Baal, is God. Key verse is 1 Kings 18:21.

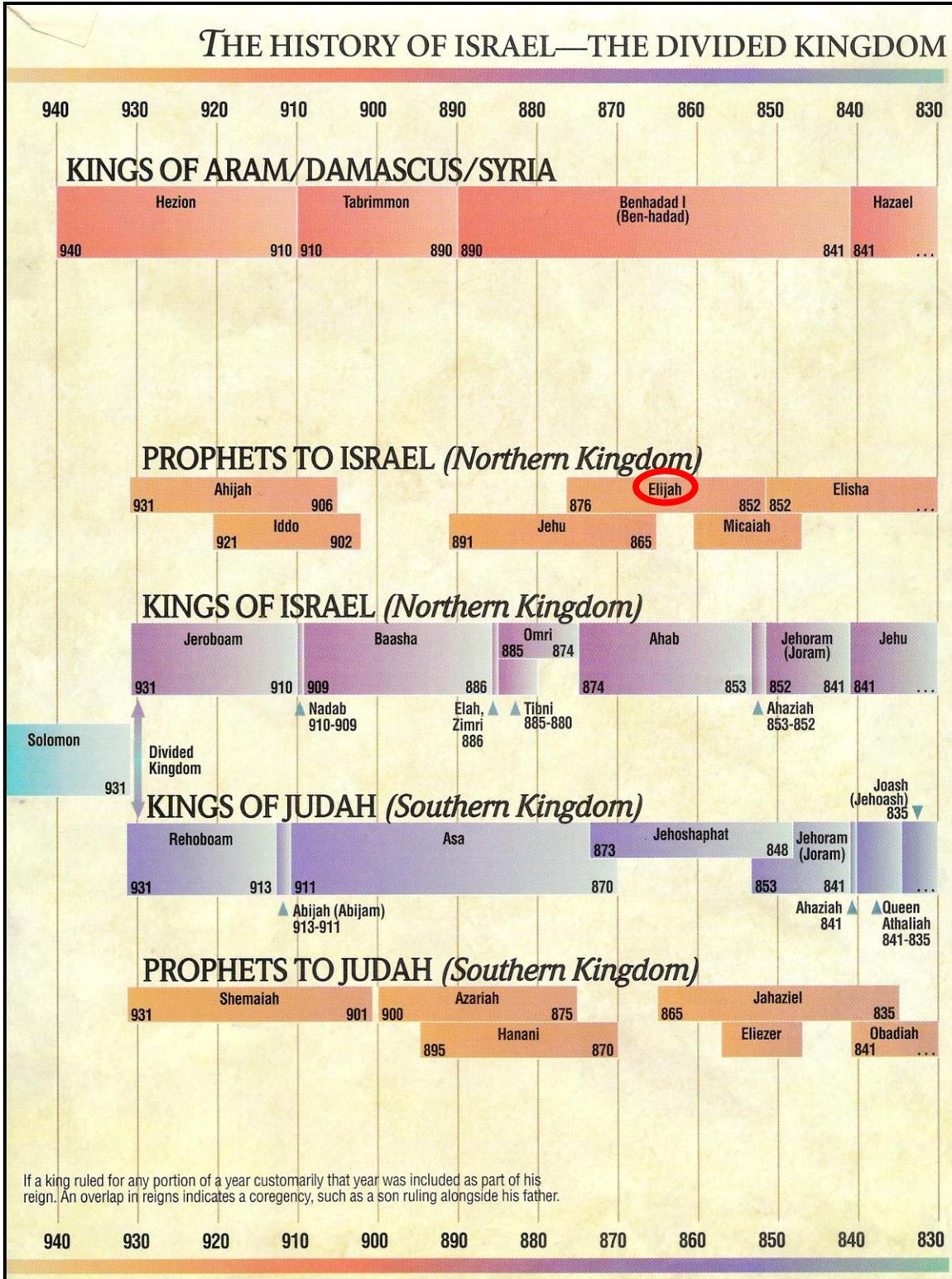
PLACES OF ELIJAH:

The map on page 4 illustrates the locations of many of the places referenced in Scripture. Some important locations include: Mt. Carmel, where the superior power of Yahweh was proven and the prophets of Baal were proven false; and, Zarephath, where God preserved Elijah, the widow and her son through an inexhaustible supply of flour and oil.

TIME OF ELIJAH:

The chart on page 5 illustrates the time in which Elijah lived in reference to prevailing kings, kingdoms and other prophets. It should be noted that Elijah was a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel primarily during the reign of the Israel's king Ahab and Judah's king Jehoshaphat. The time period was about 875 to 850 BC.





References:

Commentary from “The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible.”

Map from “The Macmillan Bible Atlas.”

Chart from “The International Inductive Study Bible”