

“The Answer of God”

February 17, 2019

I Kings 19:1-12

Open your Bible, if you would, to the eleventh chapter of Romans.

You’ve heard me say over the years that there are about 3,000 people referred to in the Bible. Actually, there are exactly 1,948 specific people mentioned in the Bible and another 1,000 unnamed individuals. But, of those 1,948 people referred to in the Bible, most are obscure, barely even mentioned in passing. Some of them? Just a name. And, of those, only 1,800 don’t share their name with anyone. And, besides that, most of the 1,948 are found in some sort of list; like a genealogy list.

But, you can also narrow down the stories of the OT to a very small group, just 111 people. The 111, you could say, are considered major Old Testament characters. God, the Holy Spirit, captured their stories on the pages of your Bible.

And all 111 are teachers. The best word I’ve found to describe them is this; they are *teaching* lives; your examples. Some are good, some very good, some bad, and some very bad. And Christians have been learning from these 111 for generations.

Today, I want to narrow our list down to just two; the only two who made it out of here alive. Just two of them never died. Do you know which two Bible characters skipped death; went directly to heaven? The first was Enoch, the great-grand-father of Noah. Enoch went for a walk one day and simply walked out of this world into God’s presence. And the second is said to be the greatest of the prophets, the Prophet Elijah. Elijah, though, got into a flaming chariot

pulled by horses made of fire and a whirlwind swirled him up into heaven (II Kings 2:11).

Today, I’d like to say something about one of these two; the man Elijah; a man, the Bible says, is just like us (James 5:17). He lived in the days of the Divided Kingdom. And he lived in the northern kingdom. He lived at a time when the spiritual temperature of the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, had reached one of its lowest points. And God spoke to Elijah. God gave an answer to Elijah. It’s found right here in Romans eleven.

I took the title for today’s sermon from the answer God gave to Elijah “The Answer of God.” Shall we pray?

Please find with me those four words “the answer of God” here in Romans chapter eleven. I’ll begin reading at verse one. And, as I read, look with me at a man who must have had very close, intimate walk with the LORD; verse one.

Romans 11:1 *“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. (2) God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not [don’t you know] what the scripture saith of Elias [Elijah]? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel saying, (3) Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down [demolished] thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.*

*(4) But what saith **the answer of God** unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. (5) Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (6) And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”*

Paul is concerned with the matter of God’s dealing with the Jews; verse one, “Has God cast away His people?”

Now, I want to take you to Elijah’s conversation with God. But, in order us to understand how Elijah’s conver-

sation fits into our lives today, we need to put him into context. We need to find out what the LORD says about a man named Ahab, the man who was, in those days, the king of Israel. And a man who did everything he could to oppose and withstand Elijah; King Ahab.

You see, just like with your life today, God often brings people into your life your polar opposites. King Ahab was definitely Elijah's polar opposite. Many of the Old Testament's 111 characters have their lives described in light of a particular person; someone, in many cases, who gave them a significant amount of grief. And, remember this, God brought them into their lives for *His* specific purpose.

So, if you would, hold your place here in Romans eleven and open with me to the days of Elijah. Those days are found in I Kings chapter sixteen. And the man whose life is a complete contrast to Elijah is this idolater known in history as Ahab.

Do you remember the story of Moby Dick; written by Herman Melville? Do you remember Captain Ahab? Any idea where Melville got his name? Here's how he describes Captain Ahab in Moby Dick. "*He's Ahab*, boy; and Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king! ... And a very vile one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?"

And, what's even more interesting is this. One of Captain Ahab's crewmen, the narrator of the story, a man named Ishmael, was warned by a prophet on the wharf in Nantucket, Massachusetts, to not sail with King Ahab. That prophet in Moby Dick was a man named Elijah.

It's now the ninth century B.C.; somewhere around 850 B.C. And the Northern Kingdom is ruled by Israel's seventh king, King Ahab, the seventh king since King Solomon. And Ahab, along with his wife Jezebel, were anything but good Jews.

How do we know that? I Kings 16:29; they worshipped, not the God of Israel, but a god whose name is Baal. Look with me at I Kings 16:29 "*And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria [Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom when Ahab's father, Omri, made it the capital] twenty and two years. (30) And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord **above all that were before him.***

*(31) And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, [Jeroboam was the first king of Israel after it became the Divided Kingdom; and it was Jeroboam who set up the first idols for the Jews to worship] that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians [The Zidonians were Canaanites who prayed to Ashtoreth and Baal], and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. (31) And he reared [raised] up an altar for Baal in the house [temple] of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. (33) And Ahab made a grove [altar]; and **Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.**"*

It seems that there is nothing good whatsoever said about Ahab in the Bible. So, Ahab, the seventh king of Israel, led the Jews about as far away from God as he could. He and his wife Jezebel idolatrous Jews. He did more evil in the sight of the LORD than any other king before him. And he provoked the LORD to anger more than any other king before him. Baal was his god. Baal, sun god, one of the many gods worshipped by the Canaanites. And he was known by the title "the giver of life." The reason for this was because he was supposed to have vanquished the god Mot, the Canaanite death god. Baal was also responsible for droughts, plagues, and such terrible calamities. And it was at the high places of Baal that parents would throw their newborn babies into a fire to another god by the name of Molech

(Jeremiah 32:35). In the New Testament, Baal is known as Beelzebub.

Now, just a word about idolatry. In idolatry man looks around and worships what he sees with his eyes. But any man or any woman who looks past everything and looks up can see the Invisible, True, Living God. Idolaters have a low view of God and a lower view of the truth. How do I know that? God made it simple and plain. Exodus 20:3 *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ...”*

You may not be able to see God; but He’s here. You may not be able to audibly hear His voice; but He’s speaking to you right now. And some of you here today have your own idols; it might you yourself as the idol you worship. It might be your work or your talents or your money or even your goals. The biggest question each day of your life isn’t “What do I need?” but, “Who do I need?” You see, the True and Living God wants your whole heart; all you time and all your attention. He won’t share your loyalty with anybody or anything. Here’s Isaiah 45:22 *“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”*

Ahab, like all idolaters, was blind. And you too are blind if you can’t see the Invisible God.

So, those were the days of Elijah; days when Ahab and Jezebel put a price on the head of every single prophet of the LORD; days when they took the lives of many of God’s prophets. And in those days everyone was commanded to worship Baal; probably a lot like our own country where the LORD is not given His place of highest honor in our nation even though we say we are one nation under God; days in which our government is deciding to give parental permis-

sion to allow their children to be born and then choose if they want them to live or to die. Maybe we’re living again in the days of Elijah.

Now, go back with me again Romans 11:1.

I found something quite significant as I read and re-read these chapters in Romans over the past few weeks. In Romans nine, for example, Paul quotes the Old Testament twelve times. In Romans ten, he quotes the Old Testament nine times. And here in Romans eleven, Paul quotes the Old Testament seven times. That’s 28 quotations in these three chapters. Do you think Paul wanted us to believe the trust the Old Testament Scriptures for today? Yes, he did.

In this little section here of six verses Paul gives us two of those Old Testament quotations, both of them from the Book of I Kings. By the way, half of the Book of I Kings is a record of the life of Elijah. So, here’s Paul’s question *“Is God through with the Jews?”*

Paul gives one answer with two illustrations.

First, he uses his own life as proof that God is not through with the Jews. And then he uses Elijah; verse one. Romans 11:1 *“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”*

Now, did you know that the Jews, a lot of the Jews, a lot of Jews today are not children of God? That’s Paul’s teaching in Romans nine (see Romans 9:8).

And did you know that, when it comes to salvation, it is God who seeks man and not man who seeks after God. That’s Romans ten. The Jews of Paul’s day and the Jews of today claim that everything depends upon your personal effort to attain a right standing before God. That’s Romans ten. You see, it’s always been true that in the matter of salvation, God seeks man. That’s Romans ten.

Then, here's Romans eleven. And what does Romans eleven teach? That there's a grace-elected remnant among the Jews.

So, you might get the idea from Paul's message here in Romans that he was saying that God was through with the Jews. He's not. And how does Paul prove it? He offers himself as evidence; verse one.

I'm an Israelite. I'm a descendant of Abraham. And I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. By the way, all the left-handed people in the Bible are Benjamites. So, it's possible that Paul was left-handed.

Oftentimes the Jews of today are told that the New Testament is a book on ways to persecute the Jews. But that's completely false. <https://www.oneforisrael.org/met-messiah-jewish-testimonies/>

So, Paul offers *himself* as evidence that God has not cast off His people.

Second, Paul points to Elijah. Elijah, remember, is probably the greatest of the Old Prophets. So, Elijah is evidence that God's not through with the Jews. How do we know that? Verse two.

Romans 11:2 *"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not [don't you know] what the scripture saith of Elias [Elijah]? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel saying, (3) Lord, they [Ahab and Jezebel] have killed thy prophets, and digged down [demolished] thine altars; and I [Elijah] am left alone, and they seek my life. (4) But what saith **the answer of God** unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal."*

Paul asks "Don't you know what the Scripture says?" "Don't you know what the LORD says to Elijah? Do you want evidence that God is not through with the Jews? Go back, says the LORD, to the days of Elijah. And then he quotes I Kings 19:10.

If you'd like to find it with me, turn back to I Kings 19:10. Here's what we read. I Kings 19:10 *"And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."*

And here's God's answer. I Kings 19:18 *"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."*

It must, to this very day, be an extremely difficult thing for the Jews to read and study the Old Testament. Here's why. There are so many places just like I Kings 19:10 that present the Jews in a terrible light. Look closely at these words *"... the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant..."*

Do you know how many times the Old Testament says that the Jews had forsaken the LORD and His covenant? Thirty-eight times. That's almost one for every Old Testament Book. But, all through the Scriptures, you'll also read this. Jeremiah 51:5 *"For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."*

The history of the Jews is a history of forsaking the LORD; of turning their backs on God; of turning to idols for help. They forsook the LORD. They destroyed the altars dedicated to Him. They killed His prophets. And, in the days of Elijah, it was a Jewish king, King Ahab and his wife Jezebel who set a price on Elijah's head. Yet, we know that the LORD loved the Jews and still to this day, loves the Jews. He has not cast them off.

Some of you have often concluded that the LORD has forsaken you. You've been tempted to say to yourself "I'm the only one." Folks, circumstances and the people in your life might be saying one thing to you "You're alone. Nobody else will stand for You. I'm it. LORD, I'm standing for

You.” And you begin to voice your complaint to the LORD. Listen to Elijah; verse three of Romans 11 “... *and I am left alone, and they seek my life.*”

Think about it like this. Wherever Paul went; wherever he preached Christ; whenever he entered a town with Jews or made his way to the synagogue, he must have felt a lot like Elijah; “... *and I am left alone, and they seek my life.*”

And what was God’s answer to Elijah? Romans 11:4 “*But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.*”

Do you see how God responds to our insecurities and doubts? He says “I am in total control. Don’t despair because what you see with your eyes is not all there is.” When you think it’s dark and a time to despair, look to the LORD Who has everything solidly under His hand of love.

From a rational and humanistic viewpoint God should have given up on the Jews thousands of years ago. But He did not.

“Has God cast off the Jews?”

First, says Paul, I offer myself as evidence that God has not cast off His people.

Second, I offer Elijah, the greatest of the Old Prophets, as evidence.

And third, Paul says, there is a grace-elected remnant; verse five. Romans 11:5 “*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (6) And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*”

There’s always been a remnant. There has never been a time in history when there wasn’t a grace-elected remnant. In the days of Elijah, notwithstanding the wickedness and idolatry of the reign of King Ahab, God had rescued 7,000 of His prophets from the sword of King Ahab.

Elijah clearly felt that he was the only prophet of God left in Israel. But God knew better. He did what you so often do?

He looked at the circumstances and was convinced by the circumstances that God had lost to Baal. So, the LORD’s answer to Elijah is “*I have reserved to Myself 7,000 men who have not bowed to Baal.*” “No, God has not abandoned or rejected His people.”

And what’s the LORD’s answer to you when you are tempted like Elijah was? He says “I’ve got 7,000 others that you don’t know about; 7,000 just like you, Elijah; 7,000 who haven’t bowed the knee to Baal.”

Do you see the LORD’s answer to Elijah? He’s specific and He’s encouraging. And He’s right and you’re wrong.

Some of you are being persuaded by your circumstances instead of being persuaded by the Sovereign God of Israel. You think (and act), like Elijah. You’re convinced that the enemy has killed the prophets and destroyed His altars, and that you’re the only one left and the enemy he’s after you. So, lift up your heart to Him today and look for Him to be specific and encouraging to you.

You see, there’s always a grace-elected remnant; a remnant is what’s left after the rest has been used up; the left-overs. The remnant is made up of the survivors. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Ezra, Zechariah; even Zephaniah all refer to the grace-elected remnant. [Found on <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/remnant/>].

Grace is always in operation; even and especially when it seems as though you’re all alone in standing with the LORD.

Possibly the sweetest and most precious word in the Bible is this word grace. Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve. He’s always giving and always giving more than we know.

And one final word of encouragement to you who are thinking wrong thoughts about God and about your life.

Read and study the Old Testament. These are the records God has left for you to find and understand Him. Your Bible is where you'll find your greatest encouragement, not in your circumstances and not in people. So, you see, it's more important Who God is than what happens to you or happens around you. Your LORD Jesus Christ is the Living and True God.

And, the first thing that must be done in any circumstance you find yourself in it this. Look to the LORD. A problem with a person God has placed into your life? A financial setback? A health need? A problem at work? In everything, look to the LORD first.

So, in conclusion, are you trusting in the LORD or are you trusting in your own thoughts? Walk so closely to the LORD that, when it seems there's no hope, look to the LORD and listen for Him to speak to your heart.

Here's how another one of God's prophets said it.

Isaiah 40:28 *"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. (29) He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*

(30) Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: (31) But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Shall we pray?

Hymn #