

ELIJAH AND AHAB

I Kings 17; 18

All the notes this time begin with the division of Solomon's kingdom, and this background material is very important to the understanding of the lesson. Read at the least I Kings 11:26–43 and 12 to have the facts concerning the division clearly in mind. The reasons for the breaking up of the kingdom should be discussed with all the classes above the Primary.

Doctrinal Points

When we have come into a regenerate state, our minds are more immediately subject to temptation than our hearts.

Unselfish love—the Lord's love—in our hearts is the only thing that can give us happiness.

Notes for Parents

Sometimes when everything goes well with us for a while, we become overconfident and forget that we must still “watch and pray” that we “enter not into temptation.” Long-continued success is not always good.

We remember that kings and queens came to Solomon to consult with him and ask his advice. As time went on, he made alliances with women from the idolatrous nations whom his people had been told to destroy. He “loved many strange [foreign] women,” brought them into his household, set up places of worship for their idols, and finally began to worship those idols himself. This is a picture of the way in which we, when all is going well with us, often fall in love with the pleasures and possessions of the world and forget the first commandment.

In order to support all his wives and to keep up the splendor of his court Solomon had to levy heavy taxes, and the people became restless under their burdens. After Solomon's death they petitioned

his son Rehoboam to lighten this burden. His wise older counsellors advised him to grant their petition, but instead he listened to the young men and tried to show his power by making the burdens heavier. So the ten northern tribes rebelled and set up an independent kingdom, which was called Israel. The southern kingdom, called Judah, remained faithful to Solomon's line, kept its capital at Jerusalem, and continued the worship in the temple. But Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, in order to keep his people from going to Jerusalem to worship, set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan in the far north. The kings of Israel were uniformly evil and idolatrous. Their reigns, for the most part, were short and stormy, and the royal line changed often. This is a picture of what goes on in our minds when we forget the worship of the Lord and allow ourselves to reason from selfish and worldly considerations.

One of the most powerful and successful of the kings of Israel was the Ahab of our story for today. History rates him as a great king, but the Bible says of him that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." Remember what the Lord had said to Samuel: "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." This is something we all need to think of often. So in the days of Ahab the Lord sent the great prophet Elijah to declare that the land was to suffer a prolonged drought. The worldly mind is unable to receive truth from the Lord—the rain of heaven. When we are absorbed in selfish pursuits, the Lord still speaks to us in His Word, warning us of our danger. And He still preserves in us, hidden in our memories, the verses from the Bible which we have learned or heard in our childhood, just as He preserved Elijah until Ahab had reached a point at which he had to recognize his need of help and so became willing to listen.

Elijah's test is one which we all need to think about very seriously. The prophets of Baal worked hard all day and even "cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets," but no fire from heaven descended upon their altar. Similarly, we may work very hard—even

injure our health—in the pursuit of worldly possessions and power, but it does not make us happy. Happiness comes only from unselfish love in the heart, and the Lord alone can give us this as we worship Him and obey His commandments. We cannot serve self and the Lord at the same time. Jesus told his disciples: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” As Elijah said to the people, “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him.”

Primary

Tell the children simply that after Solomon's death his kingdom was divided, and that the people in the northern part stopped going to the temple to worship and finally became so bad that the Lord sent the prophet Elijah to warn them. Teach the children the name *Elijah*. Then tell them about the drought and its results and go over the story of the two chapters as simply as possible. Read as much as possible from the Word, since there is little in the letter of this story which the children cannot understand, and no paraphrase of it can possibly be more dramatic and powerful.

Do you remember what Solomon asked of the Lord? It was a “wise and understanding heart.” And you remember the Lord granted his wish and also gave him power and riches and all sorts of beautiful possessions. Wouldn't you think that Solomon would have been so grateful to the Lord that he would always have loved and obeyed Him?

But you know your parents do a great many lovely things for you, and yet you do not always obey them, do you? When you want very much to do some selfish or naughty thing, you are likely to forget all about obeying. That was the way it was with Solomon. He got to thinking he could do anything he pleased, and so his people began to be dissatisfied with him.

After Solomon's death his son could not hold the kingdom together. It was divided into two kingdoms, the southern one called Judah and the northern one Israel.

The people of Israel forgot the Lord and set up two golden calves to worship, one in Bethel in the southern part of their kingdom and one in Dan in the north. Finally one of their kings, Ahab, set up also the worship of the god Baal, the god worshiped by his wife, Jezebel.

What great prophet did the Lord send to rebuke Ahab?
What did Elijah tell Ahab?
When Ahab and Jezebel tried to kill Elijah, how did the Lord take care of him?
When Ahab was finally ready to listen to the Lord, what did Elijah tell him to do?
Where did the people gather?
What was the test to be?
How did the prophets of Baal try to persuade their god to hear them?
How did Elijah build his altar?
How did the Lord show which was the true God?
What did the people all say when the fire fell?
What did Elijah tell them to do?
What did Elijah do to the prophets of Baal?
What happened afterward?

Junior

After your introduction, follow with the story of Elijah, using a map to locate the brook Cherith, Zarephath, Carmel, and Jezreel. (Note, however, that the location of the brook Cherith has never been exactly fixed.) Have the class look up and read Luke 4:24-26 (*Sarepta* [KJV] is the Greek form of *Zarephath*). The correspondence of the worship of Baal, of the drought and consequent famine, and of the fire from heaven can easily be understood by children of this age, and the meaning of the choice offered and of the test and its result is an important lesson.

Who was the third great king of all Israel?
What does his name mean?
What did he ask of the Lord?
What did the Lord also give him?
What did he build?

Even Solomon's great wisdom did not insure him against temptation. In his later years he did something which led to the breaking up of his kingdom. He was so great that he could have anything he wanted, and so he married a great many wives, women of different nations and religions. Then he built them temples for the worship of their gods, and naturally this led other people away from the worship of Jehovah and so divided and weakened the nation. And finally even Solomon himself began to worship these other gods.

It took a great deal of money and manpower to do all this and to keep up the grandeur of Solomon's court, and this meant that the people were heavily taxed and began to be dissatisfied.

When Solomon died and his son Rehoboam came to the throne, the people asked him to lighten their burden. The old men advised him to do as the people asked, but the young men urged him to show his power by increasing the burdens instead. He listened to the young men, and the people rebelled and the kingdom was divided, only the southern part, called Judah, remaining faithful to the line of Solomon. Judah kept its capital at Jerusalem and continued the worship in the temple. But the ten tribes in the northern part of the land set up a kingdom which they called Israel, making Shechem their capital and taking Jeroboam, a former general under Solomon, as their king. In order to keep them away from Jerusalem, Jeroboam set up two golden calves for them to worship, one in Bethel and the other in Dan.

When Jeroboam set up the golden calves, it was prophesied that his line should not continue on the throne of Israel. This prophecy was fulfilled, but the later kings continued the worship of the golden calves and brought in the worship of other idols as well. Many of them were killed by violence, and the royal line changed many times. Our lesson today is about the most wicked king of them all.

What was his name?

What was the name of his wife?

What god did they worship?

What great prophet was sent to warn Ahab?

Ahab and Jezebel blamed Elijah for the drought which followed, but the Lord took care of him.

Where did he hide first?

Who brought him food?

When the brook dried up, where did the Lord send Elijah?

What did Elijah ask the widow to do?

What did he promise her?

What other wonderful thing did he do for her?

Look up Luke 4:25-26 to see how long the drought lasted. (*Elias* is the Greek form of *Elijah* and *Sarepta* the Greek form of *Zarephath*.) Look up Zarephath on a map and also see how the country was divided after Solomon's death.

The Lord saw that suffering had made the people—even Ahab—willing to listen to Him. Read from the Word the story of Elijah's return and meeting with Obadiah (I Kings 18:1-16). Even evil men may have good servants. When we are in selfish states, our "good servants" are the memories we have of what we have been taught about right and wrong, especially from the Word. It was through the good Obadiah that Elijah could reach the ear of Ahab.

Look up Carmel on the map. It is a long ridge. One end of it juts out into the sea and the other end overlooks the plain of Esdraelon or Jezreel, through which the brook Kishon runs. It was at this brook long before that Deborah and Barak overcame the army of Sisera.

Read carefully from the Word I Kings 18:21-24, which tells of the test Elijah proposed to the people. The worship of Baal represents putting ourselves first in everything we do. Sometimes people are willing to work very hard and even to suffer in order to gain selfish ends. This is like the prophets of Baal, jumping about all day and calling on Baal and even cutting themselves with knives. The prophets of Baal are all the thoughts and arguments that try to make us believe that it is right to be selfish. See if you can think of some of these arguments.

What did Elijah build?

Read carefully I Kings 18:31-35 about his preparations. He wanted to prove to the people that nothing they could do would interfere with the Lord's answer.

What happened when he called upon the Lord?

The fire from heaven is a picture of the Lord's love—unselfish love—which always comes down into our hearts when we offer what we have to Him instead of thinking of ourselves in everything we do. Unselfish love is the only thing which really brings happiness.

Selfish people sometimes have fun for a short time, but they soon begin to want something else and are never truly satisfied or happy. If we stop to think, we can all see that this is so, just as the people **acknowledged the Lord when they saw the fire come down.**

When the people were ready to worship the Lord again, the rain came. You remember that water pictures truth. Rain from heaven is the Lord's truth coming down to us. When we turn away from our selfish thoughts and begin to worship the Lord, His truth can be revealed to us.

Intermediate

Something can be done with the meaning of Solomon's temptation and its results, stressing especially the weaning away of Israel from worship at Jerusalem. The protection of Elijah by the Lord, the meaning of the drought and famine, the return of Elijah when Ahab had been brought to a humble state of mind, and the meaning of the suggested test are all powerful lessons and easy to present.

The reign of Solomon presents an ideal of heavenly life. Under him the ancient Hebrews enjoyed their greatest prosperity and prominence. But this state could not last. The Word gives us teaching for life. Our lives are not a continual upward progress. We know that no sooner have we gained the victory over one temptation than we find ourselves faced with another. Every victory has its inherent temptation, the temptation to be self-satisfied and to imagine that we are now strong enough to do as we please.

During the latter part of Solomon's reign his very prosperity and grandeur led him to take wives of many nations, to build temples to their gods, and to burden his people with heavy taxes in order to keep up all his glories. So the seeds of division were sown. And at last even Solomon himself fell into idolatry. Only when we reach heaven can a state of lasting peace be attained. Here in this world, if our characters are to grow, we must always be discovering new and deeper evils in ourselves to be fought and overcome.

After Solomon's death the kingdom split in two. Judah, the southern kingdom, remained under the kingship of Solomon's line and kept its capital at Jerusalem. Israel, the northern kingdom, took Jeroboam as its king, setting up its capital first at Shechem and later at Samaria. Israel and Judah represent the two parts of our natures, the understanding and the will. When these are in agreement, we are at peace; but unfortunately we often find them at war. We never wholly desire what our minds see to be right, and often we desire to do right but fail because of wrong ideas in our minds. So most of the rest of the Old Testament story, until the coming of the Savior, is a story of two warring kingdoms, each having a succession of kings and both eventually falling captive to their enemies. Judah had some good kings but the kings of Israel were uniformly evil. This pictures the fact that we sometimes mean well even after our ideas have become false. The particular evil which caused havoc was the setting up of false gods, as in our lives it is the tendency to serve self and to fall in line with the ideas of those in the world around us. The people of Israel and Judah were weak because they forsook Jehovah, in whom alone was their strength. We are weak whenever we turn away from the Lord.

Jeroboam, in order to keep his people from going up to Jerusalem to worship, set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan, and established this worship for Israel. This pictures the setting up of "natural" goodness and learning and worldly success above the things of the spirit. We recall that Shechem and Bethel were the sites of Abraham's first two altars. Now they are wholly perverted. The history of Israel is the history of violence and of frequent changes in the royal line. The evil is constantly traced to the setting up of the golden calves. It is said repeatedly of the successive kings of Israel, "He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin."

Elijah appeared in the reign of Ahab, one of the most powerful and most idolatrous of the kings of Israel. Ahab had a long and outwardly prosperous reign. Secular historians consider him one of

the greatest of the kings, but the letter of Scripture gives him no praise. He married Jezebel, daughter of the king of the Zidonians, who has come to be regarded as one of the most wicked of all the women of history. She led Ahab and the people of Israel into the worship of Baal, which pictures self-love ruling.

Israel under Ahab and Jezebel pictures our minds when they are governed by false and selfish principles. We have come to set up ourselves above everything else. When our minds are in such a state, we want to forget the teachings of the Word of God. Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, represents the Word. Ahab and Jezebel tried to destroy Elijah, but the Lord preserved him, first at the brook Cherith near the Jordan as long as there was any water in the brook, and then at Zarephath, far to the north on the Mediterranean Sea, which pictures what we might call the “back of our minds.” Perhaps we imagine that we are never in the extreme state pictured by Israel in this story; but we really are in it every time we are bent on having our own way, arguing in favor of ourselves and closing our eyes to the truth we know which forbids what we want to do.

Elijah’s first appearance in the Bible story is with the prophecy of drought and famine. When self becomes the center of our thought and life, no “rain of truth” from the Lord can fall into our minds and no “fruit of goodness” can grow in our acts. But after a while we begin to realize that having our own way is not making us happy after all. Nothing seems to be prospering with us. Our “land” is dry and barren. Then of our own accord we begin to try to find out what is really wrong with us. Ahab set out to find water. And that is just where the Lord can begin to help us again. Ahab had a servant named Obadiah who “feared the Lord greatly.” In each one of us, however far we may stray from the right, there is a memory-knowledge of right on which we depend to keep our conduct in some external order, as Obadiah was “over the house” of Ahab. It is by means of this memory that the Lord speaks to us. It is easy to see why, in their search for water, Ahab and Obadiah went in different directions and why it was Obadiah who found Elijah.

Elijah told Ahab to gather all the prophets of Baal at Carmel for a test. Carmel is a high promontory overlooking the Mediterranean at one end and the valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon at the other. This valley was the site of many crucial battles—including that between the armies of Barak and Sisera. The ascent to Carmel is a picture of raising our thoughts to a plane where we can view all our accumulated knowledge and all our past experience in temptation and victory, and so freely reason out the problem of allegiance to self or to the Lord.

The prophets of Baal, the arguments in favor of self, worked hard, but they could draw no fire from heaven. Fire from heaven is unselfish love, which alone can give us happiness. Only obedience to the commandments, Elijah's altar of twelve stones, brought this fire from heaven—in spite of all the arguments against it, pictured by the barrels of water. When we see this and determine to turn from selfishness and serve the Lord, our land is once more watered by the rain and again becomes fruitful.

Basic Correspondences

Israel in the divided kingdom = the understanding

Judah in the divided kingdom = the will

Elijah = the prophetic Word

Baal = self as a god

Senior

There is so much in this lesson for the Seniors that the teacher will do well to go through the whole lesson as rapidly as possible and then let the questions and comments of the class suggest its further development.

Our study of the Old Testament from the time of Abraham has seemed to indicate a gradual progression, reaching its climax in Solomon. But the story of Solomon teaches us a deep and much-needed lesson. Success has its temptations. We never in this world reach the point when we do not need to be on our guard against our own weaknesses and evils.

Solomon's wisdom and grandeur attracted to him the great of

many nations. He began to take wives from these nations, although the Hebrew people had been commanded not to do so. In the life of the soul this is a picture of our tendency to adopt the likes and tastes of those among whom we live without examining them to see if they agree with our religious principles. This is one of the faults into which we are particularly likely to slip just when we think we are established in the good life. Solomon built temples and altars to the idols which his wives worshiped and ended by worshiping these idols himself.

So his kingdom came to an end with his death, and his son was able to hold only the southern part—two tribes. In general, in the divided kingdom, Judah represents the will and Israel the understanding. United under Solomon these two parts of the land picture the times in our lives when we both know what is right and want to do it. But such states are brief. Doubts arise in our minds. Is it worthwhile to give up our own way always and serve the Lord? Is not the sacrifice too great? The Israelites rebelled against the price they seemed to be paying for the grandeur of the united kingdom. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, instead of listening to the advice of his more experienced counselors, tried to keep his people in line by adding to their burdens. So the northern kingdom broke away and accepted another king, Jeroboam.

Jeroboam, to keep the people from drifting back into their old allegiance, set up the worship of golden calves at Bethel and Dan. The golden calves picture "natural" goodness, the setting up of external good works as the real good, independent of recognition and service of the Lord. How easy it is for us to fall into the popular idea that material benefits are the real good works, and that it does not matter whether or not one thinks about God and worships Him so long as he is kind and charitable in external ways! But no deed is really good which is not inspired by the intention of serving the Lord and directed by His truth. Without this we attribute our good works to ourselves, and this is the beginning of spiritual decline, as the setting up of the calves was the beginning of the Israelites' downfall.

The line of David continued on the throne of Judah to the end, and several of its kings were good men who maintained true worship and carried out reforms. But it was not so in Israel. Chapter 16 tells of a series of short, stormy reigns, which picture our state of mind when the will and the understanding are divided. No principle can long rule in the mind which looks to self as supreme. The whole history of Israel is the record of a series of evil, idolatrous kings and of frequent, violent changes in the royal line.

Then Ahab, the most wicked of them all, came to the throne. He took to wife Jezebel, who has come down in history as the synonym for evil in women. They both worshiped Baal, which pictures the love of self ruling in the life. It is not hard to see why drought and famine were the result. Spiritual drought and famine are always the result of putting self first.

Against this dark background we have the wonderful history of Elijah. Elijah, like all the prophets, represents the Word. What Elijah said to Ahab the Lord through His Word says to us when we fall into self-centered and evil ways. Somewhere in our minds, no matter how hard we try to silence it, is a voice from the Word, which the Lord preserves and feeds as He did Elijah. And eventually we are driven by spiritual drought and famine to seek out Elijah and listen to him.

Chapter 18 presents one of the most striking and powerful pictures in the Bible. Every detail is interesting in the letter and still more so in its spiritual meaning. The three and a half years which the drought lasted represent the fullness of time in a selfish state and the preparation for a new beginning. At the last of this period even Ahab was looking for water. He had with him his servant Obadiah, a God-fearing man. Obadiah pictures that memory of a better kind of life which persists even with the evil and through which alone the mind of an evil man can be reached. Notice that in the search for water Ahab went one way and Obadiah another, and it was Obadiah who met and recognized Elijah.

Elijah called all the people together to Mount Carmel to witness a test between Baal and Jehovah. To make the test between self-

worship and worship of the Lord we have to raise our minds to higher levels of thinking than our everyday ones. The prophets of Baal, who are many, picture all the reasonings which favor self-love. Some examples of these reasonings are: “You have to look out for yourself; no one else will”; “God helps those who help themselves”; “You have to be practical and realistic in this world.” These reasonings are constantly active in our minds—they cry all day to Baal. But there is one thing which self-love cannot do for its devotees: it cannot bring them happiness, the fire of unselfish love, the Lord’s own fire.

Elijah’s altar of twelve stones pictures the setting up of the Lord’s laws to govern our lives. The bullock sacrificed is the recognition that all the good we may do comes from the Lord. The water poured over the sacrifice is all the worldly reasonings which we have held to be true and which we imagine make the worship of the Lord useless. But upon the altar erected to the Lord, divine fire fell and the people were convinced. Baal’s prophets were destroyed. Then abundant rain followed, meaning that we are enabled to see and understand divine truth once more, and our life again can become happy and fruitful.

Adult

This is a very important lesson for the Adults because it describes and analyzes a temptation which we are all subject to right up to the end of our lives, and perhaps more especially we of the New Church. We can make no compromise between belief in the Lord and the Word and acceptance of worldly reasonings, and we should teach ourselves to examine the ideas of modern churchmen and Bible students to see which of them are really valid and which are based on rejection of the Lord and the Word. Elijah’s words in I Kings 18:21 are addressed to us.

We are coming to the closing chapters of the history of the ancient Hebrew church. Let us pause to review briefly the outline of this history: the beginning in the call of Abraham to leave his own country and his father’s house and go to the land of Canaan; the gradual development and growth through Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob; the settlement in Egypt under Joseph; the bondage, the call of Moses, the deliverance, and the wilderness journey, during which the commandments were given, the tabernacle built, and the twelve tribes molded into a nation; the initial conquest of the Holy Land under Joshua; the confused period of the Judges, when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” and they fell into one difficulty after another; the transition under Samuel when they were brought back to the worship of the Lord; and finally the period of the kings, when under Saul, David, and Solomon they were brought into order, conquered all their enemies, captured Jerusalem, built the temple, and became for a short time a powerful, peaceful nation to whom other nations paid tribute.

It is not hard to see in this outline the story of the spiritual development of a man or woman from the first childish consciousness of the necessity of doing right instead of merely having one’s own way, through the experiences of early education and development, the temporary bondage to natural knowledges and pleasures, the long and often painful and protesting struggle to bring the external life into order according to the commandments, the long-sought establishment in the land of spiritual living, the temptation to be satisfied with half-conquest and to compromise with one’s deeper evils instead of rooting them out, the gradual unifying of the life by means of the adoption of ruling principles of a more and more interior character, until one tastes the power and peace which come only to a life inmosty devoted to the service of the Lord.

But this is not the end. Such states do come to regenerating men and women even in this life, but they pass. They are only foretastes of heavenly happiness. We need these states, but we cannot remain in them because we are always finite and imperfect. Our ideal, the Divine Humanity, is eternally ahead of us; our test is in Him—not in ourselves. So with every victory are associated new temptations, exposing deeper evils in us and opening the way—if we are faithful—for new conquests. We are told (I Kings 11:1) that King Solomon loved many foreign women and in verse 4 that “it

came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God.” The realization and enjoyment of victory and peace have performed their use, and the Lord permits evil once more to appeal to our affections, exposing some weakness of which we have not been conscious and starting us on a new spiritual task.

Swedenborg tells us that Israel represents the spiritual or “thinking” side of the church and Judah the celestial or “loving” side of the church in general or in the individual (AC 4292), the relation to the Lord of the understanding and of the will. Many interesting things are said of the reason for the division of the kingdom with reference to the Israelitish Church as a representative church (see especially AC 8770), but we are trying rather to relate the stories of the Word to the individual life. The history of the divided kingdom is the history of adult life. We all know from experience that desire and understanding do not always go together. We have good desires which we do not have the knowledge to carry out in act, and we have bad desires which we know better than to carry out. We ourselves are often in a “divided” state, desire pulling one way and judgment another. When desire and reason go hand in hand there is satisfaction and accomplishment, but if we remain too long in that state we slip into self-satisfaction and self-indulgence. These lead to division again, for it is in the divided state that we acquire new truths which point out our selfish feelings. The Lord has provided for this sort of division in order to make it possible for us to change. Our natural desires are selfish. If our thoughts were always in complete subjection to them, we should always think only the things which suited our selfish purposes, and the Lord could not reach us. However, the separation of thought and affection should be temporary, always looking toward reunion on a higher plane. When we have good desires, we should seek the wisdom to carry them out. When we learn new truth, we should cultivate the desire to put it in practice. A good desire which does not seek its appropriate knowledge not only fails to accomplish anything good but also rapidly degenerates into self-love, while truth

which we are satisfied merely to know still more quickly becomes lost in the realm of fruitless reasonings. It was because Israel and Judah remained stubbornly separate that both were eventually taken captive.

Ahab was the seventh ruler of the separate kingdom of Israel. He was not a descendent of its first king, Jeroboam. In fact, the reigning house in Israel had already been changed by violence three times. When our thought life is separated from its true purpose of serving for the growth of spiritual character, it is easily upset by every new and revolutionary idea. The kings of Israel had been uniformly evil, but it is written of Ahab that he “did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.” He not only continued the worship of the golden calves, which Jeroboam had set up, but he married Jezebel, daughter of the king of the Zidonians, who worshiped Baal, and set up a temple and altar to Baal in Samaria itself, which his father had made capital of Israel. The worship of Baal pictures the perversion of worship of the Lord into worship of self. The writings tell us (AE 159) that Jezebel represents the delight of the loves of self and the world or “the church completely perverted,” and (AE 324²¹) that the worship of Baal represents worship from the loves of self and the world. So under Ahab—in our correspondence—the thought life has degenerated further than the setting up of “external good works”—the golden calves—as the highest good, and has come to consider self-gratification the object of life. Then drought and famine came. When once we make up our minds that the object of life is to serve self, our minds are shut against truth from the Lord and everything in us which can nourish spiritual life dies. “No Divine truth flowing in out of heaven could be received because of the falsities of evil, which were signified by ‘other gods’ and by ‘Baal,’ whom they worshiped.” (AE 644⁸) The falsities of evil are the perverted reasonings which always spring up in our minds when we want to defend our selfish desires. We all know how we close our minds against good advice when we are bent upon having our own way. Under these conditions there could be neither dew nor rain in the land.

In this crisis the Lord sent Elijah. The mission of a prophet was always to denounce evil and prophesy its punishment and to encourage the good by promising reward. Consequently the prophets were always hated by the evil and cherished by the good. We know that there were many other prophets besides those whose sayings are recorded in the Word; in chapter 18 we read of a hundred prophets whom Obadiah saved from Jezebel. The Israelites doubtless received much direct instruction as to their external conduct from such prophets throughout their history. But those whose sayings found place in the Word transmitted a message of permanent and universal import. Of these Elijah is one of the most important, so important that he is used throughout the Word as a symbol of the prophetic parts of the Word. We recall that Moses and Elijah, symbolizing the Law and the Prophets, were seen talking with the Lord at His Transfiguration. Swedenborg tells us that in the Word as it is in the heavens, in place of the name Elijah appears “the prophetic Word” (SS 71). In our lives Elijah stands for the Word prophesying, denouncing evil, showing us what the results of our evils will be if we persist in them, and showing us also the rewards of a good life. In the New Testament John the Baptist performs the same office and is called “Elias [Elijah] which was for to come” (Matthew 11:14). Today we do not need prophets in the flesh because we have the Word. The Word tells us all we need to know. If we do not reach the heavenly life, it is not because the Lord has failed to warn us just as He did not fail to warn Ahab through Elijah.

Elijah was preserved by the Lord at first in the land itself beside the little stream Cherith. The ravens which fed him represent the most natural thoughts about right and wrong which, though not true, can be used by the Lord to maintain some spiritual life. We recall that a raven was first sent out by Noah after the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. When the stream dried up, Elijah was sent outside the land until the time was ripe for his return. In the same way, the Lord always preserves in us something of the Word, keeping it alive as long as possible in our active consciousness and then in the external region—“the back of our minds”—whence it can be

recalled when we become desperate over our condition. A widow represents one who wants to be good but lacks truth. In the state of our life pictured by Israel under Ahab, a widow outside the Holy Land represents perhaps some little remainder of kindly feeling of an external type, something which can be appealed to, and with which there is, like the widow's son, some seed which may grow into spiritual life. Elijah found the widow almost dead, gathering two sticks with which to prepare her last meal and oil. This represents a time when there is almost no nourishment left even for the the promptings of external kindness. Elijah gave her a strange command: "Make me thereof a little cake first," meaning: "Do something, however small, in recognition of the Lord, and the little remains of goodness will be tided over and maintained until the way is again opened for truth to enter the life." Many people who have no real knowledge of the Lord and who in general lead self-satisfied and self-centered lives still hold in their memories a verse here and there from the Word which may from time to time influence their actions. The Golden Rule is perhaps the commonest of these. Do we not see in such instances Elijah preserved by the widow of Zarephath and in turn preserving her? Not uncommonly we are allowed to see the working out of the rest of the story. The widow's son died, picturing a time when life suddenly becomes empty and useless, when a person sees no possible happiness in the future. Then the Word which has remained with him shows its power and renews his spiritual life by lifting up what he had thought dead and restoring it. He recognizes the power and its Source and turns to the Lord. However worldly and selfish we become, however persistently we shut out the voice of the Lord speaking to us through His Word, divine providence preserves Elijah somewhere on the outskirts of our minds so that to the very end of our life in this world there may be some little opportunity left for us to hear and repent.

The time came when even Ahab was forced to look for water. He took with him his servant, the God-fearing Obadiah, and it is significant that in their search Ahab went one way and Obadiah

another, and it was Obadiah who found Elijah and brought Ahab to him. Ahab's greeting was, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Self-interest always finds the voice of the Word troubling. Then follows the test. The people were summoned to Mount Carmel—picturing the fact that the whole mind must be lifted up where it can see and judge clearly in spiritual light. Elijah stated the issue clearly: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." This is the fundamental issue which the Word places before every one of us. Love to the Lord and love of self are diametrically opposed to each other. If we choose to serve the Lord, we must put self-interest out of our considerations; if we choose to serve self, we must not expect any of the blessings promised to those who serve the Lord. We cannot serve the Lord on Sunday and self the other six days. We cannot serve self until we have made a fortune and then make up for it by building a church or endowing a hospital. If we say we believe in the sole Deity of Jesus Christ, we must study His life and follow Him, instead of thinking we or other men know better than He what the wise life is. If we say we believe the Sacred Scriptures to be the veritable Word of God, we must accept them as providentially given and preserved and not try to change them to suit men's ideas of what the Lord ought to have said. In our story, when Elijah declared the alternative, the people did not know what to answer. If we listen for any length of time to the promptings and demands of worldly and selfish reasoning, we become confused and hesitate to make the choice boldly.

There were many prophets of Baal but only one prophet of the Lord—many false ways but only one true one. The voices of worldly reasoning are many and loud. The prophets called upon Baal all day. They jumped about and even cut themselves with knives and lancets. Of a prophet we suspect to be false we may at times hear someone say, "He must be right. Think how hard he has worked, how he has given his whole life to the study of this thing!" But the fire from heaven does not fall upon the sacrifices of those who do not worship the Lord. The fire from heaven is the Lord's unselfish

love coming into the heart, which alone can give happiness. Those who look to self and to human intelligence for direction are never satisfied.

Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord which was broken down. He built his altar of twelve stones. We must return to the worship of the Lord and accept all the truths of the Word as necessary to genuine goodness. We must prepare our sacrifice according to the Lord's order, doing whatever good we do in His name and not in our own. Then we may let men argue about it all they like, as Elijah allowed them to drench the sacrifice with water until the water ran all around the altar: it will make no difference. For when we call upon the Lord, He will hear and crown our efforts with happiness and peace, which are the evidence of His presence. The people who are happy are those who do not think of themselves but who look upon life as an opportunity to serve the Lord. We are happy when we have forgotten ourselves in love for the Lord's work. If we will go up to Carmel and observe the test, we shall have no doubt of the truth.

Then the people were ordered to take all the prophets of Baal and let not one of them escape, "and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there." When we have really seen that the Lord is the only one worthy of our service, we must search out all the false reasonings which have defended our self-love and destroy them in the light of truth from the Word. Then Elijah told Ahab to eat and drink. Our "individuality," which has led us so far astray, is allowed to recover strength so that when the rain begins—when truth again flows into the mind from the Word—we may go forward to a new spiritual state.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 4844¹²: "What is related of Elijah, that when there was a famine for want of rain in the land he was sent to Zarephath to a widow, and that he asked of her a little cake, which she was first to make and give to him, and was afterwards to make for herself and her son, and that the barrel of meal with her was not consumed, and the cruse of oil did not fail, was

representative, like all the other things related of Elijah, and in general all that are in the Word. The famine that was in the land because there was no rain, represented the vastation of truth in the church; the widow in Zarephath represented those outside of the church who desire truth; the cake which she was to make for him first, represented the good of love to the Lord, whom, out of the little she had, she was to love above herself and her son; the barrel of meal signifies truth from good, and the cruse of oil charity and love; Elijah represents the Word, by means of which such things are done.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What did Solomon build? *temple*
J. What did Solomon later do which was wrong? *worshipped idols*
J. What was the result? *kingdom divided*
P. What were the names of the two parts of the divided kingdom? *Israel, Judah*
P. In which one was Jerusalem? *Judah*
J. What did the first king of the northern kingdom do to keep his people from going to Jerusalem to worship? *set up two gold calves*
J. Whom do historians consider the greatest king of the northern division? *Ahab*
J. What was his wife's name? *Jezebel*
J. What disaster happened during his reign? *drought*
P. What great prophet was sent to warn Ahab? *Elijah*
P. What did Ahab try to do to Elijah? *kill him*
P. How did the Lord take care of Elijah? *ravens fed him*
J. When Elijah came back, what test did he suggest to Ahab? *“The God that answers by fire . . .”*
J. Where was this test carried out? *Mount Carmel*
J. How long did the prophets of Baal call upon their god? *all day*
P. How did Elijah prepare his altar? *twelve stones, twelve barrels of water*
P. What happened when Elijah called upon the Lord? *fire came*
J. What did the people say? *“The Lord is God”*
J. What happened to the prophets of Baal? *Elijah killed them*
J. What came as a result of this test? *rain*
I. What do (1) Israel, and (2) Judah, represent?
(1) the mind or understanding
(2) the heart or will
S. What does Elijah represent? *the prophetic Word*