

Lesson 2

1 Kings 16:29 - 17

1) Historical Background

- a) For over a hundred years, the Israelites lived under the reign of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. After the death of Solomon, a civil war occurred and resulted in a division of the kingdom into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah).
- b) The Northern Kingdom lasted for over 200 years until it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. During that 200 year period, the Northern Kingdom had 19 kings – each of which was wicked.
- c) The Southern Kingdom lasted for over three hundred years until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. (This was followed by the 70 year captivity and the return to Jerusalem led by Nehemiah and Ezra.) During those 300 years, the Southern Kingdom had 17 kings – eight of which followed the Lord and nine of which were wicked.
- d) Elijah and Elisha preached to kings from the Northern Kingdom – and so as we meet a new king in our studies we don't need to ask whether he was wicked because ALL of the kings of the Northern Kingdom were wicked. (Although all were bad, some were better than others. Jehu, for example, was certainly not as bad as Ahab.)

2) Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 16:29-34)

- a) The story of Elijah begins with the story of King Ahab, who along with his wife Jezebel, is a central figure in the ministry of Elijah.
- b) How did Ahab come to be king?

- i)** The first king of the Northern Kingdom was Jeroboam. 1 Kings 13:33 tells us that Jeroboam deviated from the word of God by setting up altars to pagan gods.
 - (1)** Jeroboam was the first Northern king, and his wicked life is used as a yardstick to measure the wickedness of the Northern kings who followed him.
 - (2)** We can learn two important lessons from Jeroboam. First, tolerance of disobedience leads to an increased disobedience. Second, we may have an indication from Jeroboam that God considers the first deviation from the truth to be worse than the deviations that follow from it. Jeroboam certainly seems to get much of the blame for the increased wickedness that followed his reign. The lesson for us is that we must always be on alert for any deviations from the word of God.
- ii)** Nadab, Jeroboam's son, was the next king, but he lasted only two years until he was assassinated by his successor, Baasha. (1 Kings 15:27-28).
- iii)** When Baasha became king, his first act was to kill everyone else in the household of Jeroboam. He then reigned for 24 years. (1 Kings 15:29-30).
- iv)** Elah, the son of Baasha, was the next king, and he reigned for 2 years (and got only 2 verses!). (1 Kings 16:7-8)
- v)** Zimri became the next king by killing Elah and everyone else in his household. (1 Kings 16:9-13). Zimri ended up killing himself by burning the palace down on top of his head. (1 Kings 16:8)
- vi)** Following the death of Zimri, there was once again a civil war of sorts as the people tried to choose between Tibni and Omri. Omri eventually prevailed and became the next king. (1 Kings 16:21-22) The Bible tells us that Omri "wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him"! (1 Kings 16:25)
- vii)** After Omri died, his son became king – and who was the son of Omri? King Ahab, which is where our story really begins.
 - (1)** Omri and Ahab are presented as the antithesis of David and Solomon. Under Ahab, Israel reached the zenith of the power it

was to enjoy as an independent state, and plumbed the depth of its corruption. If Athaliah his daughter had succeeded in her attempts to wipe out David's descendants in 2 Kings 11 then the Davidic covenant and the blood line of the promised Messiah would have come to nothing.

(2) We are told in verse 31 that Ahab treated the sins of Jeroboam as a light thing – that is, as a trivial matter. Things had gotten so bad by the time of Ahab, that the departures of Jeroboam were hardly departures at all. But isn't that the way with all departures from the word of God?

(3) Example: The Disciples of Christ or Christian Church's first deviation from the word of God was the introduction of musical instruments in the worship service. And where did that deviation lead? Today, their web site (disciples.org) includes a link (under Peace and Justice Links) to a group among them called GLAD – the Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance. (If you want to know where you are headed, look at the road you are on!)

(4) The divine estimation of Ahab's character in 21:25 stands as a tragic epitaph to his wasted life: "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord."

c) The story of Ahab begins with a marriage – and his wife was a very infamous person. Ahab married Jezebel. Who was Jezebel?

i) F. B. Meyers calls Jezebel the Lady Macbeth of the Old Testament. Charles Swindoll refers to her as "Satan's woman of the hour" at the time of Elijah.

ii) We know immediately that she is going to be significant because she is the first wife of a Northern king who is named in the Bible.

iii) But why is she significant?

(1) First, she was the dominant partner in this marriage. As we will soon see, Jezebel was the actual ruler of the kingdom rather than her husband Ahab.

(2) Second, she was the one who placed the worship of Baal on the center stage in Israel.

- (a)** Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, was the King of Tyre and Phoenicia (the Sidonians) who had come to power by murdering his predecessor.

 - (i)** The marriage between Ahab and Jezebel was political. Israel needed a new ally against Syria, and Tyre needed to trade with Israel.
 - (b)** The worship of Baal (which originated with the Canaanites) had long existed in the area of Sidon.
 - (c)** Baal was worshiped as the god of rain and fertility. Baal was the storm god, which was considered very important in an agricultural community. The people believed that Baal controlled the seasons, the crops, and the land.
 - (d)** Of course, the Baal cultists had to explain why Baal could not always make it rain on time, and so they created two other false gods – Mot and Anat. Baal submitted to Mot (the god of death) each year, causing a drought. Fertility was restored when Anat defeated Mot and freed Baal from the world of the dead.
 - (e)** Ahab and Jezebel were very soon going to discover who really controlled the rain!
 - (f)** When Ahab married Jezebel, she was allowed to continue to worship Baal as she had in her homeland, but she was not content with second place for her god. She wanted Baal to be moved to center stage, and Ahab obliged her.
- d)** Verses 32-33 tell us that King Ahab provoked the Lord by building an altar for Baal and making an Asherah.
- i)** The Asherah was the chief goddess of Tyre, and in Canaanite mythology was considered the mother of Baal. (Based on an Internet search, it appears that modern day witches are still quite enamored of Asherah.)
 - ii)** Its symbol was the stem of a tree deprived of its limbs, shaped into an image, and planted in the ground. They are sometimes translated as “groves.” These images were also sometimes made of silver or of carved stone.

- e) Verse 34 is very curious. At first, it seems to be out of place, but it tells us two very important things.
 - i) First, verse 34 tells us that during the days of Ahab and Elijah, the people had become so evil that this man in verse 34 felt free to offer his own children as sacrifices to build a city.
 - (1) “The foundation sacrifice, revealed by modern archaeology, is probably what was involved. The children named were probably infants, dead or alive, placed in jars and inserted into the masonry, propitiating the gods and warding off evil.”
 - ii) Second, this wicked event reminds the reader of God’s word through Joshua that rebuilding Jericho would bring death to the builder’s family.
 - (1) Joshua 6:26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, “Cursed be the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.”
 - (2) And isn’t it interesting that the curse in that verse was in the end carried out not by God, but by the parents of the children themselves!
 - iii) Verse 34 also reminds us of the stark contrast between Israel’s past under Joshua and its present state under the evil King Ahab – “Israel no longer conquers the Canaanites but instead embraces their religion and courts their fate.”
 - iv) The message of verse 34 is that God’s word is still active in history despite all of the sin in Israel. God is still in charge, and the events in the remainder of 1 Kings will highlight that message.

3) God Keeps Elijah Safe (1 Kings 17:1-7)

- a) With his sudden, unannounced arrival in Chapter 17, Elijah plunges “full-force into the midst of this era of gross evil and wickedness.”
 - i) “Without question Elijah is one of the most distinctive and diversely talented individuals in the Bible. He is a prophet, preacher, political reformer, and miracle worker all at the same

time. At the heart of this multifaceted person, though, rests an overriding conviction. Elijah hates Baalism as much as Jezebel loves the cult, and he desires to magnify God over Baal and defeat the interloping religion once and for all.”

- ii) And, as we are about to see, the first words from the mouth of Elijah in the Bible will drive a stake through the heart of Baal.
- b) As we saw last week, Elijah appeared at a very dark time in the history of Israel.**
- i) J. Oswald Chambers: “Elijah appeared at zero hour in Israel’s history... . Like a meteor, he flashed across the inky blackness of Israel’s spiritual night.”
 - ii) Another commentator writes that at the time of King Ahab “the chasm between God and His people had reached its widest breadth.” Elijah stood alone in that gap.
- c) With his first recorded words he tells Ahab in verse 1 that there will be no dew or rain these years until God says so.**
- i) But Baal was the god of rain. Right? Wrong!
 - ii) The most important word in verse 1 is the word “years.” A drought of years would mean death – this was very clearly a life-threatening pronouncement against the King and his kingdom.
 - iii) Interestingly, this event is later applied figuratively to the two witnesses in Revelation 11.
- (1) Revelation 11:6 These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy.
- d) We can learn three things about Elijah right from the start.**
- i) We can learn something from Elijah’s name.
- (1) The Hebrew word for God is Elohim, which is sometimes abbreviated El. The word “Jah” is the word for Jehovah. Between “El” and “Jah” in Elijah’s name is a small personal pronoun meaning “my” or “mine.”

(2) Thus “Elijah” means “My God is Jehovah.” His very name would have been seen as an attack on Ahab, Jezebel, her family, and their false god Baal. (Remember that Jezebel’s father was named Ethbaal (“with Baal”).)

ii) We can learn something from Elijah’s hometown.

(1) Elijah was from Tishbeh, which is why he is called “Elijah the Tishbite.”

(2) We do not know its exact location other than that it was in Gilead, which places it somewhere on the eastern side of the Jordan river in the so-called northern Transjordan area.

(3) Gilead was a rugged, austere land; it was not “a place of polish, sophistication, and diplomacy.” And we can see that Elijah was much like his hometown – bordering on the coarse and crude, the rough and the rugged (not unlike many of his fellow prophets throughout the years who were sent by God to wake people up!). He has much in common with the latter day “Elijah” that appears in the gospels to announce the coming Messiah.

iii) We can learn something from Elijah’s style.

(1) As one commentator wrote “right from the get-go, Elijah was in the king’s face. Without a moment’s hesitation, with no apparent fear or reluctance, Elijah stands before Ahab the king and comes right to the point.”

(2) Why is that surprising? For over sixty years the kingdom of Israel had been known for its murderous, cutthroat rulers, and the present king and queen were the worst of the lot! Talk about courage!

(3) Swindoll: “Onto this stage steps a prophet from nowhere. He follows no protocol, makes no introductions, offers no deference to the royal presence. He is without sophistication, polish, training, or courtly manners. He simply announces that there will be no rain except by the word of the God of Israel.”

(4) Elijah was not afraid to stand alone in the face of evil. God is always looking for people who are willing to stand alone in the gap; people who are willing to make a difference in a world of corruption and indifference. And God found such a man in the prophet Elijah.

- (5) What does God find today when he looks at our world of tolerance and compromise? Are we willing to stand up against evil? Are we able to come right to the point?
 - (6) No one will ever be an Elijah by keeping their mouth shut. No one will ever be an Elijah by blending into the scenery. No one will ever be an Elijah by keeping their seat.
 - (7) God wants people who are willing to stand up, step forward, and open their mouths when confronted by evil and compromise. We let him down when we do anything less. We should pray every night that God will give us opportunities to be an Elijah and confront the King Ahab's that are everywhere in the world around us!
- e) Chapter 17 has been called Elijah's "boot camp" experience. It was here in which Elijah was trained to trust in God.
- i) Elijah is first told to go hide by the brook Cherith, which is East of the Jordan.
 - (1) Why is Elijah hiding? You would be hiding too if you had just said what he did to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel! God has some future plans for Elijah, and he wants him to be around for awhile longer.
 - (2) The name of the brook Cherith is derived from a Hebrew word meaning to cut off or cut down – and both meanings accurately describe why Elijah was here.
 - (3) First, he was cut off from the people – he was hiding to escape from Ahab. Second, Elijah was there to be cut down as he was taught to trust in God for all things. Not long ago Elijah was standing before the King, and now he is cut off and cut down. God had two purposes in sending Elijah to Cherith: protection and training.
 - (4) We don't know if there was any pride in Elijah, but if there was, this experience (like Paul's thorn in the flesh) may have been God's way of removing it. God cannot use us if we are filled with pride and self importance.
 - (5) The text leaves no doubt that Elijah passed his boot camp experience with flying colors. When Elijah is introduced in verse 1 he is simply "Elijah the Tishbite," but in verse 24, he is addressed as "a man of God."

ii) God promises to provide for Elijah by having ravens bring him his food. Some commentators try to explain this away by translating the word “raven” so that it refers to a roving band of Arabs – but no such twisting can remove the miraculous from this chapter. God provided for Elijah by miraculously having birds bring him food.

iii) Verse 5 tells us two important things about Elijah’s trip to Cherith.

(1) First, it tells us that Elijah went to live at Cherith. He was not on vacation; this was not a day trip. Elijah went to Cherith to live there, which is what he did for sometime less than three years. (The events in Chapter 18 pick up three years after Elijah’s pronouncement in 17:1.)

(2) Second, Elijah obeyed God without hesitation. God told him to go out into the wilderness and live – and Elijah went.

(a) Have you noticed that God never told Elijah what the second step would be until after he had taken the first step? We love to look far down the road and unravel the entirety of God’s plan for us, but God wants us to walk with him one day at a time, trusting in him and obeying him. If we take each step with God, then we don’t need to worry about where we are heading or where we will end up.

iv) In verse 7, the brook dries up. This looks bad at first, but, as we will soon see, this dried up brook opens up new doors for Elijah.

(1) Elijah was neither the first nor the last child of God to face a dried up brook, and he was neither the first nor the last child of God to find in that dried up brook an open door.

(2) Did the dried up brook mean that Elijah had been forgotten and abandoned out in the wilderness by God? Hardly. No one can study the Bible without quickly seeing that God does not forget his people.

(a) (Isaiah 49:14-16) But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, And my Lord has forgotten me.” ¹⁵ “Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of *My hands*; Your walls are continually before Me.”

(3) In fact, it is interesting to note that this dried up brook came as a direct result of Elijah's own prayer!

(a) (James 5:17-18) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

(b) Elijah was living in the result of his own prayer!

4) Elijah and the Widow (1 Kings 17:8-16)

a) Elijah had not been forgotten by God. God knew exactly where he was, and he next tells Elijah to arise and go to the city of Zarephath.

i) The name "Zarephath" comes from the Hebrew word for crucible – and as we will soon see that is exactly what Elijah found in Zarephath. A crucible is used to bring impurities to the surface so that they can be removed. As one commentator wrote, crucibles create Christlikeness.

ii) This city was at least 100 miles from Cherith, and so it was a long walk for the prophet, but again he immediately obeys the command of God.

iii) Of course, Elijah may have been glad to travel out of the country because Ahab was trying to kill him. But Elijah was also in danger here in Zarephath because this city was controlled by Ahab's father-in-law (Jezebel's father).

iv) It is important to note that Zarephath is located in Phoenicia, which was the very heart of Baalism. As we discussed before, the Phoenician explanation for a drought was that Baal was dead and awaiting release from the Netherworld. Elijah was about to show that his God was alive and had power over things in which Baal was totally powerless.

v) Jesus mentions Elijah's trip to show that prophets are not accepted in their own country and to show that he, like Elijah, had blessings in store for the Gentiles:

(1) Luke 4:24-26 Then He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. ²⁵ “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; ²⁶ “but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

- b)** It is interesting that Elijah is not told to go to Zarephath so that he can provide for a poor widow. Instead, he is told that the poor widow will provide for him!
- i)** Again, I think we may be seeing part of Elijah’s training. This may be God’s crucible bringing pride to the surface so that it can be removed.
 - ii)** “On the Christian journey from faith to maturity, all roads pass through Zarephath.”
- c)** But when Elijah completes his 100 mile trek and finally meets the poor widow who is to provide for him, what does she say?
- i)** (1 Kings 17:12) So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”
 - ii)** Welcome to Zarephath! *This* was the person who was going to provide for him? If he had been a day late she would have been dead!
- d)** But again God miraculously provides for Elijah.
- i)** (1 Kings 17:13-16) And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ “For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’ “ ¹⁵ So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for *many* days. ¹⁶ The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

- ii) The widow was asked to take a great step of faith herself in verse 13. Against all parental instinct, she was told to feed Elijah first with the last of her food before she fed her own son. She does so in verse 15 and is blessed along with her son with an unending supply of flour and oil.
 - iii) How many such jars of unending blessings sit unopened today because we are unwilling to take that first step of faith?
- e) We can learn two important lessons from Elijah's meeting with the widow.
- i) First, we should not become discouraged when God's plan for our life does not match the plan we have worked out for ourselves in our own mind.
 - (1) I doubt there was one instance on that 100 mile journey when Elijah pictured in his mind the situation he found when he finally reached Zarephath.
 - (2) God's plan for our life may be quite different from the plan we have all worked out for ourselves.
 - ii) Second, children of God need to work at getting the word "impossible" out of their vocabulary.
 - (1) Even today in which the age of miracles has ended, the impossible still has a way of becoming quite possible when the obedience of man meets the faithfulness and power of God. How many times could these events have been brought to a crashing halt by someone uttering the phrase "Well, that's just impossible"?
 - (2) **Jeremiah 32:17** 'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.'
 - (3) **Jeremiah 32:27** "Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"
 - (4) **Luke 1:37** "For with God nothing will be impossible."
 - (5) **Luke 18:27** But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

- (6)** Have you ever met someone who told you something was not possible – when you knew very well that it was possible? It does not inspire much confidence, does it? It does not show any faith in God when we act like we are defeated before the battle even begins.

5) The Raising of the Widow's Son (1 Kings 17:17-24)

- a)** In verse 17 we read of a death in the widow's family. Her son, who she introduced to us in verse 12, has fallen sick and died.
- b)** The widow's first reaction in verse 18 is a natural one – she looks around for someone to blame and that someone is Elijah. Just by being in her house, Elijah has seemingly focused God's attention on the household in an unhelpful way.
- c)** And Elijah's response? He holds out his hands and says "Give him to me." The difference between Elijah and the widow is that the widow thinks that the child's death is the end of the matter, and Elijah does not.
- i)** We can learn a great deal here from the silence of Elijah.
- (1)** He has trusted in God; he has obeyed God; he has provided for the widow who was supposed to be providing for him; he has done everything exactly as he was commanded to by God – and yet here he is being blamed for something he did not do. And what does he do? He stands silent in the face of the accusations.
- (2)** Elijah did not remind her that by her own admission in verse 12 the boy would have died of starvation long before had Elijah not arrived.
- (3)** Compare Elijah's reaction with that of Christ, described in Isaiah 53:7: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."
- ii)** We can also learn a great deal here from the gentleness of Elijah.
- (1)** Gentleness has been called the "mint mark of Heaven."
- (2)** Elijah had been living in incredibly harsh conditions for years, and he no doubt looked very rugged and weathered. But his response

to these accusations is to gently hold out his hands to accept the body of the young child from his mother – and she gives him the body.

- d)** What does Elijah do next? In verse 19, Elijah takes the boy's body to the upper room where he was living.
- i)** Why did he do that?
 - (1)** This is no doubt the very place where this great man of prayer had been taking his petitions to God all along! Where else would he go to make the biggest petition of all?
 - ii)** And it was in that small room that Elijah faced the ultimate question: It is one thing to rescue people from the jaws of death by providing food and oil, but can God do anything when death has clamped tight its jaws and swallowed the victim up? God can act across the border from Israel into Sidon, but is there a border that ultimately not even God can cross? When faced with Mot, the god of death, must even the God of Israel (like Baal) bend the knee? Elijah knows the answer to these questions, but the woman does not.
- e)** In verse 20, Elijah goes to God in prayer for the widow's dead son.
- i)** While Elijah was silent before the woman, he is not silent before God. Instead, he asks God the tough questions. To paraphrase his prayer, he asks God, "What in the world are you doing?"
 - ii)** Elijah is very candid with God in prayer. Are we afraid of offending God in prayer? The Bible is full of prayers – and not all of them are polite! I fear that God is much more offended by our empty prayers or our failure to pray at all than by our honest and heartfelt questions.
 - iii)** Job is a good example of someone who was perfectly candid with God and who was commended by God in the end for his faithfulness.
- f)** The prayer in verse 21 is one of the most remarkable prayers in the entire Bible.

- i)** Why? Because there had never been any example in Scripture before this point of anyone being raised from the dead!
- ii)** Talk about asking God to do the impossible! Wouldn't we have expected Elijah to tell the widow "Too bad, but what do you want me to do about it?" or even "Too bad, but what do you want God to do about it?" How would this story have ended if Elijah had just told the widow that what she wanted was impossible?
- iii)** There was no precedent for his request. He was not able to ask God to raise the boy like he had raised someone in the days of Abraham or the days of Moses. He was asking God to do something that had never been done before. What an incredible prayer of faith!
 - (1)** As an aside, because Elijah was a man of great faith, many have wondered why he was left out of the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11. But was he really left off the list? While not explicitly named, we do read in Hebrews 11:35 of women who received back their dead by resurrection. I think God had Elijah in mind when that line was penned.
 - (2)** The real question is why James in James 5:17 did not choose this episode from Elijah's life when he wanted to give an example of an effectual fervent prayer! This prayer is much more impressive to me than the prayer that brought on the drought.
- g)** In verse 21 Elijah stretches himself over the child three times and prays that God will return his life to him.
 - i)** We don't know why he used this unusual method, but he did – and then he asked, and he waited for God to act, and God acted in verse 22 by raising the boy from the dead.
 - ii)** Can you imagine the scene in that upper room when life returned to the body of that lifeless child? Can you imagine the reaction of the child's mother when her son ran down the stairs and jumped into her arms? This is without doubt one of the most beautiful and remarkable scenes in all of Scripture. In that small dusty room in that small dusty house in that small dusty village, the hand of God moved in a way that it never had before – and all as a result of one man's prayer of faith.

- iii) And notice Elijah's reaction. He takes no credit for himself. He doesn't upbraid the woman for her earlier accusations or her lack of faith. He says simply and gently, "Look, your son is alive."
- h) And the woman? What is her reaction? In verse 24 she tells Elijah that she knows he is a man of God and that the word of the Lord in his mouth is truth.
 - i) When the woman saw her son alive, she did not see Elijah, she saw God.
 - i) Interestingly, there is a Jewish tradition that says this child grew up to be the prophet Jonah! But though we have no grounds for that tradition, Jonah was the successor of Elijah and Elisha, may have been acquainted with them both, and was the link between them and Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah.

6) Lessons for Today

- a) The God of Elijah is your God, and he is still the God of impossible situations.
- b) "The real fabric of history is not the interplay of economics or the march of national destiny, but the issue of faithfulness to God."