

## Seeking God In The Mundane

The Sensational and Phenomenal Are Rare

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I have a question for you today. Are you Pentecostals? Funny that I should ask, I guess. I am sure that all of us would answer in the negative. Most of use have been in the church of God for a good long while, and know that Pentecostalism does not describe what we believe.

We may have been a Pentecostal when God called us, but we repented of that when we learned the truth and were baptized. So we do not use denominational labels like that, we simply call ourselves “Christians.” If we want to put some other kind of moniker on there, we call ourselves “Sabbath-keeping Christians,” or “Sabbatarian Christians.” Some have us called Apostolic Christians, because we believe what was taught by the apostles. But we are definitely not Pentecostal.

To some, what Pentecostalism is may be a bit murky. Here is my take on what it is. It began in the United States and was centered here in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was part of a Christian revivalist movement within Protestantism. The people who were Protestants thought that there should be more to Christianity than what was being taught at the time. So they split off and formed what was called at the time the “Holiness Movement.” The goal was to move beyond what was normally taking place in a revival, where someone would come up at an altar call and then that would be it—there would be nothing further, no further development. They would say they are saved, and off they would go.

The Holiness Movement had the goal of taking the one-time conversion experience and moving beyond that to help the believer attain to full sanctification. That was the whole idea behind Pentecostalism when it started. Pentecostals then took the Holiness Movement one step further. They glommed on to the “baptism of the spirit.”

That became the center of the religion. You had to be baptized by the Holy Ghost. If you were, they believed that would enable you, if you had this special gift, to heal the sick, to perform miracles, to prophesy before the congregation, and most importantly in the United States, to speak in tongues. That was the big thing. The same general idea goes on today.

What is amazing is that over the past half-century, Pentecostalism has experienced explosive growth, all over the world. It is especially growing by leaps and bounds in Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. The membership tends to be younger

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people, and females predominantly, more than males. The world's largest single church—now get this, this is kind of amazing to me—is a Korean Pentecostal church. It is called the Yoido Full Gospel Church. It is pastored by a man named David Yonggi Cho. It claims one million members, and they all come to the same place every Sunday. They actually have various places around the city, but they all claim to be members of this particular church in Korea.

As a little sidelight, Cho was recently convicted of embezzling \$12,000,000 in church funds and sentenced to three years, but suspended for five years. He is an old man, and they suspended the sentence so that he would not have to go to jail. That is how much pull Reverend Cho has in the country.

There is a Brazilian Charismatic church—the difference between a Pentecostal and a Charismatic is that Pentecostals are Charismatic, but not all Charismatics are Pentecostal. Pentecostal is a denominational term, Charismatic describes the idea of being “slain in the spirit”—called the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God which claims ten million members, but they are scattered over 90 countries.

So combined, Pentecostals and Charismatics add up to one-half billion people around the world. In 2011, the Pew Research Center's forum on religion and public life published a demographic report on the size and distribution of Christians around the world. It concluded that Pentecostals and Charismatics together make up more than one-fourth of all Christians on the planet, and eight percent of the world's total population. That is a lot of people.

This Pentecostal explosion is clearly indicative of a serious trend in the world, that people would glom on to this kind of religion. But what is this a trend toward?

David Roozen, of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, said, “If someone is going to be religious in today's world, Pentecostalism has a lot of pizzazz—a lot more pizzazz than sitting around reading an old book.” If I can jump out of the quote, you understand what the “old book” is. Going back into the quotation, “With Pentecostalism, you can call on the spirit. There's an element of control.”

So we have to ask the question: in this religion, who is sovereign? Is it God? Or is it the Pentecostal believer? David Roozen points out that many Pentecostals tend to come from marginalized groups—people who are poor or downtrodden in some way. That is why the young and women tend to be more likely to glom on to Pentecostalism. They come from marginalized groups who tend to feel drawn toward a belief that gives them direct access to the Holy Spirit, thus giving the powerless a sense of power. That is

what they are looking for; they are looking for power and a way to control their situation.

Much of the attraction of Pentecostalism can be ascribed to its leaders. The leaders of these churches tend to be engaging and energetic speakers that preach to thousands of people at a time, sometimes hundreds of thousands. T.D. Jakes, an American Pentecostal, went over to Kenya and one million people showed up at his rally. That is one-thirtieth of the entire population of Kenya!

When they do this, these preachers not only preach but they conduct mass healing services, like the Benny Hinn types, where people would come up and they would be “slain in the spirit,” or they would be healed.

Another thing that is attractive is that worshippers are told to come as they are. They do not have to dress up, they do not have to do anything, they just have to show up. Many are drawn to the very, very, very heavy emphasis on entertainment. A Sunday morning service often resembles a rock concert in a lot of these new Pentecostal churches. The emotionally-charged music is designed to heighten the believer’s “spiritual experience,” they say. The music helps them to “get in the spirit.” Oftentimes, the music entirely overshadows the message. The audience is encouraged to participate, however they feel moved by the spirit, and this often results in strange displays of movement or dancing, and the tongues that they use.

Two words are often used frequently in association with Pentecostalism. Those two words, which will be very important throughout the rest of the sermon, are *sensational* and *phenomenal*. Everything has to be sensational and phenomenal. Another word that is often associated with it is *emotional*. Pentecostals often speak of themselves as being “under the power of the spirit,” and the spirit being real to them, or manifested in them. They speak of ecstasy while being under the spirit. They talk of doing lots of miracles, and seeing, hearing, and witnessing signs and wonders. They want an experience of the supernatural every Sunday, if they can. They do not stress any kind of logic or rational thought—it used to be this way, more often than now, because now they have scholars and such who have put their theology in a logical way—they stress the intuitive: how they feel, what they “think in their gut” about certain things, rather than rationally seeing things through Scripture. They tend not to be analytical, but rather, emotional.

When it comes down to it, it is a religion based on a great deal of feeling and personal experience, and sad to say, abandonment to whatever moves you. Just going with the flow.

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I do not want to discount emotion or personal experience, or the work of the Spirit in miracles and gifts. Those things are very true. What we feel is what we feel. What we have experienced is what we have experienced. God's power is very real, and it can manifest itself in all kinds of great works and miracles.

We know that there are gifts of the Spirit that God gives, and they are very important to the work of the church and to our own preparation for the Kingdom of God. I do not want to discount those things at all. Those are very necessary, and they have their place in our way of life.

The problem, though, is over-emphasizing personal feelings and experiences, and intuitions, and having an excessive desire for the miraculous. These are ditches to avoid. The reason why they are ditches to avoid is because emotion and intuition are not trustworthy. They can be easily influenced by human nature that is still in us.

If we are constantly expecting God to miraculously intervene in our lives, at every turn, what it produces in us is that we easily miss seeing God in His everyday aid and blessing. We think of Him being only in the big things, rather than in the little things. It is the little things, and the things that we do not see, we will find later on, that tend to be eternal, that will last through the grave.

Believe it or not and you *can* believe it, because I am going to spend the rest of the sermon on it, one of the men of faith in the Bible, a very prominent man of faith in the Bible, the prophet Elijah, allowed himself to succumb to his emotions and to presume upon God's miraculous intervention at every turn. In a way, you could say he had a kind of Pentecostal spirit that he was manifesting in his own life. That experience will prove instructive to us. God put it in His Word to show us that even one of the great men of faith can get sucked into this hole. So we are going to look at the life and career of Elijah, especially the first half of it, up to the point where God corrects him and puts him on the straight-and-narrow.

We are going to use I Kings 17 as a kind of background, maybe even an overview of Elijah's career. This particular chapter is broken up into three sections. Each contains one fantastic miracle. In the first two sections, the miracle is God's supplying Elijah's need in food and water. You could also say not just food and water, but He also provides him a place to live and a place to hide, so there is protection there, as well. The third instance is a resurrection that is performed through Elijah.

**I Kings 17:1** And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab [now we are dealing with the king], "As the Lord God of Israel lives,

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before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

We know later that it lasted about three years from this point.

**I Kings 17:2-7** Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

We see some interesting elements here. Elijah is doing God’s work. He obviously has a message from God, so he goes to King Ahab and tells him, “Ahab, look! You guys have been sinning! The whole of Israel has been sinning! God wants you to turn back to Him. So for the next years, there’s not going to be any rain. There’s not even going to be a dewfall.” That is really arid and dry. The land of Israel relied on the dewfall, even more than the rain.

So this was going to be a very severe drought on the land. Elijah gives the message, as God wanted him to do. Then, He tells him to go to the brook and live there for a while. God would protect him there, because He knew Ahab would come after him, and Ahab did. He searched all around. In chapter 18 it shows that is what Ahab did: he went looking for Elijah, thinking that if he just got Elijah, this drought would end, because he could make it rain.

So Ahab had been looking for him, but God protected him. He got water from the brook until it dried up, and the ravens gave him bread and meat, morning and evening. That is incredible—I do not know if I would want to accept something that a raven brought, but Elijah obviously knew that God had sent the ravens, and God had directed them where to get the food, so it was good meat and good bread. But once the brook dried up, something else had to happen.

What we notice here, if we put this into an overall perspective, is that Elijah was God’s prophet. He was doing what God wanted him to do, and God was responding to him by

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providing for him. Because of the situation, He had to provide for him in a very miraculous way—it is not normal that ravens bring you food morning and evening!

This how we first encounter Elijah. He is a man of God, he does what God says, and God responds with help, with aid, with blessing, with providence.

**I Kings 17:8-9** Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”

Zarephath is outside the land of Israel, and this lady was a Gentile, most likely. That is what got people in Jesus’ time so upset when he talked about the faith of this woman above all others in Israel.

**I Kings 17:10-12** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” [“Hey lady, don’t forget that, I’m hungry as well as thirsty.”] So she said, “As the Lord your God lives [notice that she says “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.”

So we see that the drought was not just in the land of Israel, it had gone to surrounding areas and everybody was suffering. This was a terrible famine that was going on, and this lady was down to her last few bits of flour and a little bit of oil, and that was it. They thought they were dead.

**I 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. 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.’” So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 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.

Another fantastic miracle. Here she was scraping the bottom of the barrel, yet there was always some left. She thought she was shaking the oil cruse dry, but there was always something more in there. She could make bread to keep them alive.

So a fantastic miracle is again taking place, in which God is providing for Elijah's daily bread, as it were—it is everyday, it is day in and day out. It is happening over a three year period of time, this is not just a week or half a year or a year—it is three long years between the time he gave the prophecy to Ahab and the time that the drought breaks. It is a long time, and it is continuous. You wonder what is going on in Elijah's mind.

I do not know if you picked up on something which might give us a clue into Elijah's character and personality. Did you notice that when he asked her about the food, he said, "Make some for me" first. Keep that in the back of your mind, because it may be a little bit of a clue as to how he thought about himself. If I am reading this correctly, he thought of himself as an important person, someone that needs to be taken care of before anybody else.

I may be reading between the lines incorrectly, but that is how it struck me. Here this lady has just told him, "Look! This is our last bit of flour, our last bit of oil. My son and I are going to make cakes and die." And he says, "OK, make me some *first*." It comes across as a bit callous and a bit self-important. I may be reading it wrong, but I think the ways things work out in chapters 18 and 19 that this may be a correct reading. We see that he is a bit self-absorbed. This especially comes out in chapter 19.

When God presents the people of faith in the Bible, He shows warts and all. What did He show of David? What did He show of Samson? Jacob? He shows them with all of their flaws, and how they overcame them. I think that is what He is showing here. He used Elijah mightily, but Elijah was not a perfect finished product at this point. This is very early, as far as we know, this is his first recorded set of miracles, his first work for God. So he was, in a sense, "raw." He was not perfect, he still needed to be polished and made better. So we see some of these little bits of character that need to be refined.

Getting back to the idea that the providence that was happening here happened every day, continuously, that Elijah was becoming quite used to God's miraculous help. I come to the conclusion, by the time I get through all of these, that he seems to have come to expect it. There is another place that we will come to in a little bit that shows that he was not even grateful. It is kind of disturbing that he would do all of these things and see such miraculous things, and hear the Word of God spoken to him, yet he would

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still have this kind of callous attitude towards God's providence. Notice what happens in the next section.

**I Kings 17:17-20** Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him [this is a Hebraic way of saying he died]. So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" [She is thinking it is all her fault—did God send you here to expose my sins and kill my son for my sins?] And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. [notice what Elijah does] Then he cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?"

Do you realize what he just did there? He accused God of killing her son, purposefully, as a punishment on this woman. He was saying, "Look at how that makes me look!" Can you see the self-importance coming up here? He is saying, "God, why did you do that? Everything was going so well, and this woman thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. Everything was going hunky-dory, and you kill her son! That's not fair!"

But I think he thought better of that, because he does not get a response to that, so he has to approach God a different way.

**I Kings 17:21** And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul [or life] come back to him."

That was a much more humble plea. Rather than "What did you do this for, God?" which did not get any response. But when he said, "I pray, let this child's life come back to him," God responded.

**I Kings 7:22-24** Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah [it does not say He heard him the first time, but the second time, He did]; and the soul of the child came back to him [or the life of the child came back to him, the *nephesh*], and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I

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know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.”

So she sees this great miracle. Her son is brought back to life and she believes. This is what Jesus caught onto in the gospels when He mentions this. All she needed to see was God working through Elijah and she believed. That showed her great faith.

Elijah does not come out of this looking very good throughout this chapter. He seems a bit petulant, a bit selfish, and he is even a bit accusative of God, even though God does work through him. This is the background; it gives us a flavor of Elijah in the early part of his ministry to Israel. What we see coming out of it is that he had an attitude problem that God needed to fix. And He did fix it; we will see that in a few minutes.

I find it interesting to compare Elijah with the Elijah to come, John the Baptist, about whom Jesus said there was no greater born among women. It is interesting that John the Baptist did not have this problem. It makes me wonder if John the Baptist reflected more the older Elijah than the younger Elijah. Remember what Jesus said about John the Baptist was that he did no miracles, yet he was a very humble man, who came clothed with leather and ate honey. He was not big on himself, he was all about preaching the coming of the Savior. When he saw Jesus, he said, “I need to be baptized by You, not me baptize You.” Later on, when Jesus became more popular in Judah, he said “He must increase and I must decrease.”

So comparing the two men, at this juncture in Elijah’s life, John the Baptist was much more humble and meek, and willing to give up his place, compared with Elijah. God worked with their different personalities and produced great things through them. I am sure John the Baptist had his failings too, but it is interesting to see the two men, side by side.

The first 19 verses of I Kings 18 are about Ahab going out in search of Elijah, then Elijah making plans to get everybody together to have the great confrontation on Mount Carmel.

**I Kings 18:20-21a** So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people, . .

This was not every Israelite in the land, it was probably representatives of all of the

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people, perhaps a lot of the aristocracy, the important people who had been invited to this confrontation between him and the prophets of Baal.

**I Kings 18:21b** . . . and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? [They are like a little bird, perched on a limb, hopping on one leg then the other—they are not settled, they are not settling on the one good thing] If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

Elijah is saying, “It is a simple thing! You follow the Lord or you follow Baal! One or the other! Choose!” But notice:

**I Kings 18:21c** But the people answered him not a word.

They were not willing to commit to anything. They were rather ambivalent about everything and they were holding back. They wanted to see what this challenge was going to produce.

**I Kings 18:22-24** Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”

“It sounds like a great challenge. It is fair, both get a bull, both get to prepare and say the words. We will see if there is any response.”

**I Kings 18:25** Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.”

They get to go first because they are many. Their rites are longer, they have to do all of this stuff, and they had “home field advantage.” The reason why I say that is because we are talking about Baal. I need to set this up, because it is important—it is a big part

of the challenge that is going on here.

Baal is a god of storm in the pantheon. Obviously, it had not rained for three years, so Baal was looking pretty weak at the time. He was not commanding any storms to come down on the people of Israel. Secondly, we have to understand that Mount Carmel was supposed to be the seat of Baal. That is where Baal supposedly lived. That is why I say that the prophets of Baal were the home team. God and Elijah were the visiting team. They had all of the disadvantages, so it was only proper for the home team to go first in this case, and give Elijah and God the second place so that they could equal or better what the prophets of Baal did. It is only reasonable.

You need to understand that Mount Carmel is supposed to be the seat of Baal's power, and that Baal himself was a god of storm, rain, and thunder. This was supposedly Baal's contest. If you were going to put all of the things in one column for Baal, and all of the things for Elijah and God in the other column, if you were carnally minded, you would have to say "This is Baal's game. There's no way they can win. Elijah and God are the underdogs."

**I Kings 18:26-27** So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."

He is laying it on pretty thick here. "Hey, isn't Baal a god? He can hear anybody, anywhere, right? Maybe you need to cry louder. He's sleeping, or maybe he's busy doing something else—he can't be bothered. You have to get him over here." But nothing happened.

**I Kings 18:28** So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

This was a bloody mess by the time you get into the afternoon hours. They are trying to sacrifice themselves, in a way, to get their god to hear and react.

**I Kings 18:29** And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of

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the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

They were at this for about 12 hours, from dawn until evening, trying to get Baal to respond. How deflating for the home team! It was like they came to play, and the stands were empty. Nothing was happening.

**I Kings 18:30-31** Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name.”

By doing it this way, he is including the whole nation in this sacrifice, and making them understand that this was the God of the whole people. This is God’s altar. He represents all of the people of Israel.

**I Kings 18:32** Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

It is not actually that big of a trench. Two seahs of seed is about 13 quarts, or 3 gallons.

**I Kings 18:33-35** And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, “Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.” Then he said, “Do it a second time,” and they did it a second time; and he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

We do not know how big the water pots were. They may have been many gallons. They were big enough for a person to carry and pour, so they were not huge. But he had them do it three times. There was plenty of water—plenty of it soaked into the ground, plenty of it soaked into the wood and into the bull. So there were more than 13 quarts of water poured in. There was enough to fill the trench, but there was also a great deal more that had been soaked up.

**I Kings 18:36-40** And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces [thinking they would be consumed]; and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.

I am sure he did not execute all of them himself, he had the help of all of those other people who had said, "The Lord, He is God!"

It was a fantastic thing that happened here. God displayed His power to such an extent that it was literally an amazing show. The whole altar—it says the stones were consumed—a big whoosh! And it was all gone. It was visible; people could see it happening, and they knew that this God that Elijah had just prayed to, and asked to do this, was powerful. He was a God to be reckoned with. He is a God who answers His prophet, who answers prayer, who wants to be made known to the people of Israel.

We have here something seemingly impossible happening. All of these people witnessed it. Even though the challenge for God was harder than what had been challenged to the prophets of Baal (because Elijah put the water on his own offering), God came through. Just a stupendous miracle!

The underlying question in the challenge that Elijah makes here is: which god will respond? Which god is therefore real and active? Which god will help in time of need? Those are what is behind this challenge, so that the people can see, in a very visible way, which god is real and will come to their help. It is all about God's intervention, God's power, God's direct and visible manifestation of Himself in the affairs of men.

That God reacted to Elijah's prayer was a sign to those ambivalent and uncertain Israelites that the God of their fathers truly did exist—the miracles that He had done in Egypt and throughout the wilderness were real. The stories that had been told from the time that they were young, about the history of Israel, were true!

God was able to do all of these things. He was not a weakling god, He was not even a god who was confined to a particular place, like Baal was. He had done these things in the great nation of Egypt. If you believe that, you have to go back even further and know that God had done these things with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You know that God had done these things through Noah and the great Flood, and you go back further and you know that He had created all things!

It was a tremendous miracle that should have spurred their faith and Elijah's faith. "Wow, this God can hear me! This God *will* hear me! This God will respond to me, if I ask Him." The Lord is proven by this miracle, the living, Almighty God.

This is a wonderful thing to know; a wonderful thing to trust in. It is a major part of faith, to realize what God has done, to know that it is true, and to know that He is there to hear us and act in our behalf. It is something that we all have to have. He is willing to intervene in our lives for our good. But we have to realize that despite His willingness to help us, God is not a puppet that dances to our tune.

This is the problem that Elijah is beginning to have, if he does not have it already. We can never force God to act in our behalf. We are not in the driver's seat. Do you know those bumper stickers that were pretty well known, "God is my co-pilot"? That is false. We are His co-pilot. God is at the controls. He is the one who is steering our lives, and we have to understand that we are under Him.

Hebrews 2:10 has the word *archegos*. It tells us very clearly there that Jesus Christ is the Captain of our salvation, as it says in the King James, or as the New King James says, He is the Author of our salvation. Using the definitions of that word, we can say that He is the Trailblazer of our salvation. He is the one who goes before us, and we follow Him. He is the Master, we are the servant.

We have to understand that this relationship that we have with Him is not of equals. He is always greater than us. He is always the one that dictates to us. We cannot ever start thinking that we are in control of this relationship, and that He has to dance to our tune. And I think that this is what is beginning to happen in Elijah's case, that he is beginning to think of himself as much more important in this relationship than he really is.

What we are beginning to see here is a typical Israelite problem. In a way, Elijah cannot be totally blamed for this. It is part of the culture of Israelites. The Bible calls it "tempting God," or "testing God," or "putting God to the test." That is what is beginning to happen in the life of Elijah. In the Israelites case, it is seen or equated with rebellion,

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provocation, complaint, distrust, unbelief, and sin. The Israelites in the wilderness are constantly being described as “tempting God.”

It is a difficult concept to understand, because it is used in so many different ways. You do not just tempt God in one way, there are many ways in which one can put God to the test. In Psalm 78, we get a flavor of what happened in the wilderness, and we can begin to see some of the things that might be popping up in Elijah’s story.

**Psalm 78:5, 8** For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; . . . [that they] may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

**Psalm 78:12-20** Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan [which is in Egypt]. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths. He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy. Yes, they spoke against God: they said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?”

What they are doing is saying, “OK, we’re not satisfied with water coming out of rock, or this manna coming out of wherever it came from. We want meat now!” This is where God sent the quail, and they started eating it raw. Some of them died with it in their mouth when He sent the plague afterward. They are pushing God, they are always pushing God to do more. “Well, if you can do this, how about doing that?”

**Psalm 78:21-25** Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation. Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men

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ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full.

**Psalm 78:32-33** In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works. Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear.

**Psalm 78:36-42** Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongue; for their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again. How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power: the day when He redeemed them from the enemy.

We could go on and on. It just goes on like this throughout the whole psalm. The psalmist shows that it did not end with them in the wilderness; it happened in the land: they did the same thing. That is what Elijah is facing in chapter 18.

What we see is that Israel had a problem with tempting God. They had a relationship with Him. He had revealed Himself to them, He had provided for them, He had done great works among them. He protected them, He fought their battles. He had done so much; He kept pouring out His goodness and help to them, and giving them pretty much whatever they wanted. He did not spoil them by any means, but God was very gracious to them. He had mercy on them when He probably should have just obliterated them, because of all of their sin—but that is the way God is. But they still continued to push Him, to provoke Him, to rebel against Him, to sin against Him. They could not seem to learn the lesson.

To wrap up Psalm 78, I have five different forms that tempting or testing God come in. The first is persisting in stubbornness or intransigence. That is what God called stiff-necked and hard-hearted. The second is trying to impose our will upon God, to make Him do what we want Him to do. This is usually called rebellion.

The third is doing wrong to see if God is watching, to see if God will follow through on

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His threats. This is called provocation; oftentimes, they provoked Him. The fourth is acting carelessly, with the attitude that God is bound to take care of us and to forgive us. This is presumption.

The fifth is not seen quite as much in the Old Testament as in the New, but this one is twisting God's Word to mean something other than intended, or to entrap Him in a contradiction; trying to bandy words with God. This is simply called distrust and unbelief. For instance, Satan did this with Christ in the temptation, where he said, "Does not the psalmist say that if you jump off this cliff, Your foot will not be dashed against the stone? The angels will come and save You?" And Jesus' reply was, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

Those are the five things: being stiff-necked and hard-hearted, rebellion, provocation, presumption, and distrust and unbelief. The first three are typical Israelite failings, and I hope that we do not do any of these things (the stiff-necked, rebellion, and provocation).

A converted Christian, to my mind, is more likely to fall into the last two areas of tempting God: presuming upon His grace and providence, and interpreting His Word to say what we want it to say. Those are two ways to tempt God. Both of these are means or ways of forcing God to respond to our own selfishness.

We become the one with the power. We become the one who is calling the shots. We say, "OK, I'm going to just go ahead and live like this, and see if God's going to respond to me." Or we will do something that we know we should not do, saying "Oh, God will forgive me." We presume upon His mercy and grace.

We know that He is merciful, and He is gracious, but He does not want us to ever presume that. He wants us to trust in it, but presumption is a bad thing, something we should not do.

At this point in Elijah's story, to my mind, Elijah was edging very close to tempting God through first, faithlessly forgetting God's proven power. He had just seen it, in a great miracle. He also seemed to have a presumptuous "What have you done for me lately?" attitude toward God. God was always having to prove Himself to Elijah.

What we will see in chapter 19 is that Elijah became all mopey when God did not do what he thought He should do. We have to understand that this is immediately after the Mount Carmel challenge. What Elijah does here is almost unfathomable. After he had just seen God's great power in consuming the sacrifice, hearing all of those Israelites say, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" and then killing the prophets of Baal.

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Not only that, but in chapter 18, the drought ends and there is a great rainstorm.

We see all of those things coming together. God's power is just magnificent. God will provide for His people. God will break the drought. God seems to be very happy. This was a time to make a big push, because Elijah had all of the advantages at this point—he should have. He should have known that God was with him.

**I Kings 19:1-3** And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

He was confronted by the big bad she-wolf, Jezebel, and he ran. He tucked his tail between his legs and fled out of the country. He went a long way. If you look on a map to see where Beersheba is, it is all the way at the other side of Judah, down in the desert. He had to get out of town, and get out of town fast.

Is this the action of a man of God, who had just seen God perform an awesome miracle like He had just performed? No, this is a lack of faith. There are some commentators who believe that his running condemned hundreds, maybe thousands, of people to death. All of these people who believed in God, in Yahweh, were left open to whatever Jezebel decided to do. Whatever she sent her thugs to do, they could do to these people.

Did he run because he thought God had not done enough? What was he expecting God to do? Was he expecting God to miraculously convert Ahab and Jezebel? Was he expecting a signed invitation to the palace from Ahab and Jezebel, saying "I want to be baptized."?

Or did he expect Jezebel to just keel over and die? God would send a plague or something, and kill Jezebel, and get her out of the way. Or did he expect something like the palace to fall down and kill the royal family, and then Elijah could come in to the rescue.

I do not know. But he seems to have gotten this message from Jezebel saying "I'm going to have your head by tomorrow about this time," and immediately left—just got out of town. You do not even see him saying, "God, what do I do?" He just turns around and

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goes, puts 100 miles between himself and Jezebel. It takes a couple of days to go that far, especially under the transportation system that they had at that time.

But notice what happens:

**I Kings 19:4-8** But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness [that is another day], and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die [He did not ask God for help! He did not ask God what to do! He asked to die.], and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" [He considered himself a failure.] Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

Despite his bad attitude and his suicidal depression that he was having, because he wanted to die, God still took care of him, miraculously. God sent an angel, "Bake something for this man, and give him some water, and make sure that he doesn't die out there in the desert. He's My prophet. Despite the fact that he hasn't asked Me to help him, doesn't want any of My counsel." He is still going to have mercy on the man and give him what he needed to survive.

He sent an angel! It was not just ravens this time, He sent an angel! Elijah saw an angel, he heard an angel. An angel served him. That is pretty magnificent, pretty gracious of God. Yet it hardly moved him, he does not seem to notice. He does not say "Thank you." As far as we know from what it says here, he was totally silent. He eats, he lays down to sleep, he eats again, and he gets up and goes. He is almost catatonic, like sleep-walking. He just seems indifferent to the help of God by this point.

By going to Horeb, the mountain of God, by going back to where Moses and God talked to one another, it almost seems that he wants to prove that He is actually "there," that He actually exists.

The question is, how could he have forgotten what God had done in the very few days before this, on Mount Carmel? How had he forgotten it that quickly? God had proven Himself. Yet now he is off to Mount Horeb, trying to find God. And God even seems a bit

perplexed—“How can this happen?”

**I Kings 19:9** And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

“What drove you down here? Why are you here? I don’t get it, Elijah, what more do I have to do to prove that I’m with you?” And look at the sorry answer that he gives.

**I Kings 19:10** So he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

Me, me, me, me, me.

“I’ve done so much for you, God. I’ve done everything You said. And now look, everything is falling apart. All of the people are getting killed, they’ve torn down your altars, and I’m the only one left, and they’re even trying to kill me. Woe is me!”

To me, his reply is full of self-importance, self-pity, and fear. He is actually blinded to what is going on, he is blinded to reality. He cannot believe that matters have come about like this. He had envisioned everything so differently. Perhaps he saw himself leading this glorious revival in Israel, perhaps even to the point where he could rejoin Judah and Israel, and the tribes would come together, and it would be a scion of the House of David, ruling over all Israel again. And a golden age, like the age of Solomon, would once again occur in the land of Israel. But now it was down to him alone.

“We have lost, God.”

By his depression, you can see that his emotions have gotten the better of him. All of his presumptuous dreams of what God was going to do, with God’s own power, had crumbled, they were all dashed, because he was not seeing things as God saw them.

So God teaches him a lesson.

**I Kings 19:11-12** Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore

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into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

This is the lesson. God shows His raw power in the earthquake, the wind, the fire. He says, "I'm not in those. That isn't necessarily how I work." But He was in the still small voice.

It seems that God prefers to act in the quiet and the calm of words, of communication. He works through the speaking of a message. You have to remember, this is the God of the Old Testament, the One that we know of as Jesus Christ. And what does John call Him? The Logos. The Word. The Spokesman. We could say the Communicator.

This is what He is trying to get across to Elijah. He guides, and directs, and converts, and works through words. And not just simple words, but whispered words and gentle words. Elijah had presumed that God works through the sensational and the phenomenal. That is why I started with Pentecostalism, because they are looking for the sensational and the phenomenal.

But God said otherwise, He said, "I work through the still small voice," the whispered and gentle word. So God asks Him again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And do you know what, Elijah says the exact same thing that he had said a few minutes before, before the test, which suggests to us that he did not get it. He was still looking for God in all of these great acts, and all of these miracles, and all of these wonderful emotional experiences that he was having.

**I Kings 19:15-18** Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. [In a sense, He is telling him "You have to go find your replacement."] It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. [The next verse, verse 18, is very important.] Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

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Verse 18 is the bombshell that He drops on him. While Elijah had been involved in all of those grandiose displays of power, and his big plans for revival or whatever it is that he thought, God had been quietly working with 7,000 others that Elijah did not even know were there.

God had been working with them in the still small voice. Elijah was deaf to it, at least to some degree, because he was thinking so big—big for himself. He thought he was the great leader of God, and he was going to do all of these wonderful things. It was giving him a great deal of self-importance, but God had been doing His work all along.

What we find here is that Elijah was not irreplaceable. Along came Elisha, who had twice the endowment of the Spirit, and he did many more miracles than Elijah did. But notice what He tells him to do: simple things. “Go anoint him, go anoint him, go anoint him.”

What we see is that Elijah had become so wrapped up in his personal work for God that he had no time for others. This is a very stern rebuke to Elijah. It does not come across that way, but when you see it in full with all of the rest that has come before it, you can see that in a way, Elijah’s practice of religion and his doing of the work were all about him. But God is all about others. So he needed this lesson. This is what we need to understand.

**II Corinthians 4:16-18** Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

What Paul is saying is that our walk with God is a day by day relationship with Him, in which we slowly, quietly throw off the old man and we strengthen the new man. The great displays of power through miracles are temporary, and they mean far less than what God is building inside of us, unseen; the godly character that leads to eternal life and to glory.

So God speaks to us in that still small voice. And if we are listening, we grow and we bear fruit through diligently following His way of life on a daily basis.

You can look at James 3:13 and James 3:17-18, where we are told that we have to walk

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in the meekness of wisdom, and that God's wisdom is pure, and it is patient, and it is all of these softer virtues that a man like Elijah did not seem to value too highly. But in verse 18, James says righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

You may also want to look at Matthew 5:43, and read all the way down to Matthew 6:6, because that is where Christ is telling us, in the Sermon on the Mount, that we should love our enemies and become perfect like God is perfect. And the very next thing that He gets into, as part of this way of life that we are supposed to be following, is do not trumpet your good works. Do them in secret. Do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

When you pray, do not make a big spectacle of it out in the marketplace. Go into your closet and do it privately.

The work of God is happening in our lives as we live. It is not in the great displays, it is in the little bits and pieces of our lives as we go through them.

Let us finish in I Peter 3. This is particularly about women's dress, but what I want it for is the principle that comes out in verse 4, about the way that we should conduct ourselves.

**I Peter 3:4** Let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

This is what God wants to see in us. Not the great emotional displays, not the great acts of power necessarily, but He wants to see us quietly, meekly, patiently, working with Him, day in and day out, as we prepare for life in His Kingdom.