

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 25

I Kings – Ch 12-22 – Part 2

I. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL.

The timing of the lectures allows for some supplemental materials on Chapters 17 and 18 of I Kings. This is the written supplement, an addendum to Lesson 24.

II. BACKGROUND

Elijah (“Yahweh is my God”) enters Israel’s history in I Kings 17. When he enters, Israel is ruled by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel have sought to destroy the worship of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. In place of Old Testament faith, Ahab and Jezebel have instituted the pagan worship of Canaanite deities, specifically Ba’al and Asherah.

The change of Israel’s national religion was not accomplished by “friendship evangelism.” Rather, Ahab ordered death to all prophets of Yahweh.

III. ARCHAEOLOGY’S INSIGHT.

In the 1900’s our understanding of Canaanite religion grew exponentially thanks to a discovery in the Spring of 1928. A Syrian farmer (Mahmoud az-Zir) discovered a tomb of ancient pottery while plowing his field. Archaeologists began excavating the site. The excavations are still ongoing today. The site is called “Ugarit” or “Ras Shamra.”

Many texts dating from 1200 B.C. to 1400 B.C. have been unearthed and translated. Texts dating from around 1250 B.C. contain a great deal of information about the Canaanite god Ba’al. These texts include the mythology surrounding Ba’al’s power and deeds. Reading these, we discover the following:

A goddess (Anat) is summoned by Ba’al after she has destroyed Ba’al’s enemies. Anat replies she will do Ba’al’s bidding after “Ba’al sets in the heavens his thunderbolt, and causes to shine forth his lightning-flash.” (KTU 1.3).

This occurred at a time when the “world is dry and parched” because Ba’al has withheld his “season of rain.” Ba’al has done so because he is upset that of all the gods, Ba’al is the only one without a home. (KTU 1.3).

Once the father god agrees to allow Ba’al to have a house built, Ba’al at last observes “the season for his rain, his voice, the thunder, and the release of his flashing lightning.” (KTU 1.3).

Later in the mythology we learn of a seven year drought when Ba’al is dead in the underworld prior to his return to Canaan.

Ba’al is “he who rides on the clouds,” the god of rain and storms, who “flashes his lightning to the earth.” (KTU 1.3).

IV. ENTER THE BIBLE TEXTS

So it was against the Ba’al religious cult that Elijah enters and declares:

“As Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” (I Kings 17:1).

This was a direct slap and affront to the Canaanite cult of Ba’al worship. Elijah proclaimed that Yahweh is God of the rains, not Ba’al.

Similarly, shortly before Yahweh ended the drought, we had Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Ba’al at Mt. Carmel.

The Mt. Carmel confrontation was played on Ba’al’s terms. Ba’al was the supposed god who “flashes his lightnings to the earth.” In the showdown, however, Ba’al was shown to be an imposter, while Yahweh was shown as God Almighty.