



What happened before?

When Solomon died, Israel was divided; Jeroboam ruled the North; Rehoboam ruled the South. The people were worshipping idols instead of the true God. Jeroboam built idols at Dan and Bethel.

Idolatry increased until the contest at Mt. Carmel; Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal; 450 prophets of Baal were slain. This was a clear and visible demonstration to Israel that idolatry would not be tolerated by the true God.

BIBLE STORY:

Ahab continued as the king of Israel. To the north of Israel was a country called Syria. Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, marched his army into Israel and attacked the capital at Samaria. Ben-Hadad sent a message to Ahab saying that all the silver and gold, wives and children that Ahab possessed now belonged to the Syrians. Ahab, because he was so weak, agreed. Then Ben-Hadad said he was coming to search all the houses; whatever his men found that they wanted they would take! That was too much for Ahab. Even though he was weak, Ahab was ready to fight.

A prophet came to Ahab and told him that in order to prove to Ahab that God was still in control, He would deliver Syria into his hands. Ahab's small army went out of the city and attacked the Syrians and won the battle! In fact, Ahab defeated the Syrians twice. In the spring of the next year, Ben-Hadad came again and invaded Israel. The first battle had been fought in the hills. This time the Syrians attacked in the plains, thinking that God was only a God of the hills and could not help Israel in the plains. They were wrong. God is everywhere—not just in the hills! God gave Ahab another victory over the Syrians. When the battle was over, Ahab foolishly made a treaty with Ben-Hadad and allowed him to live.

The prophet who had told Ahab that God would give him victory did a strange thing. He had someone strike him and wound him. He tied a bandage on his head. When Ahab came by, the disguised prophet told him about letting a prisoner escape that had been given to him to keep. Ahab said the man should die for letting the prisoner get away. Then the prophet snatched the disguise off his head and told Ahab that he had done wrong in letting the Syrian king get away. Because of that, God would require the life of Ahab and the destruction of his kingdom.

Ahab was soon involved in another sin. Near his palace was a vineyard owned by Naboth. Ahab wanted this vineyard for himself. He offered to buy it or give Naboth another vineyard. But Naboth wanted to keep it. Ahab was displeased. He went to his bedroom and turned his face to the wall and would

not eat. As he lay there pouting like a child, Jezebel came in. Ahab told her about Naboth's vineyard. Jezebel promised to get the vineyard for him. Jezebel then arranged a feast, pretending to honor Naboth. At the feast, she had men come in and falsely accuse Naboth of having cursed God and the king. Naboth was taken out of the city and stoned to death. Jezebel told Ahab he could have the vineyard, for now Naboth was dead!

Ahab took possession of the vineyard, but God told Elijah, the prophet, to meet Ahab in the vineyard. Elijah told Ahab that because of this sin, his family would be destroyed and Jezebel would die a violent death. Ahab was truly sorry for his sins. God was merciful to him and did not bring the judgment upon Ahab's household while he was alive.

There were three years of peace between Syria and Israel. Ahab was still king of Israel and Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. Jehoshaphat reigned for 25 years and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. The Syrian king, Ben-Hadad, had earlier promised that, in exchange for his freedom, the Syrians would give back all the cities they had taken from Israel, but he had not done this. Ahab went to Jehoshaphat and asked him to fight the Syrians for those cities. Jehoshaphat agreed, but first he wanted to ask a man of God if they should fight. Ahab brought his own prophets and they said the Lord would be with them in the battle. Jehoshaphat wasn't satisfied and asked for another prophet. The prophet of God, Micaiah, whom Ahab hated intensely, came and told them that Ahab would die in the battle!

The Syrians were only interested in killing Ahab. They did not want to kill the other Israelites. Ahab thought if he disguised himself before going into battle the Syrians would not know who he was and he would not be killed. When the Syrians saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was the king of Israel and almost killed him. He called out that he was the king of Judah and they stopped pursuing him. They did, however, find Ahab. Ahab died in battle that day. Micaiah's prophecy was fulfilled.

Ahab's son, Ahaziah, followed him as king of Israel. Ahaziah lived only two years after becoming king, and was followed by his son, Jehoram. Jehoshaphat was still king of Judah when Jehoram became king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was a good king. But the kings of Israel, Ahaziah and Jehoram, were wicked.

Ahaziah fell through a lattice and was wounded. Instead of seeking help from God, he turned to Baal—a big mistake! Elijah the prophet said Ahaziah would die because he turned to Baal and that is exactly what happened.

Elijah knew his time on earth would soon end. God had chosen Elisha to take his place. Elijah went with Elisha to Bethel, Jericho and then to the Jordan River. At each of these places, Elijah wanted to leave Elisha behind, but Elisha refused to be left behind. He knew Elijah was about to leave him. When the two men came to the Jordan River Elijah took off his mantle and struck the water with it. The river was divided and they walked through the path that was made in the river. As they walked together, suddenly there appeared a brilliant chariot of fire, drawn by fiery horses. The chariot separated Elijah and Elisha,

and then a whirlwind took Elijah up to heaven. Elisha saw Elijah ascend and when he looked down he saw the mantle Elijah had worn. Elisha took the mantle and struck the waters of the Jordan River. The waters were divided once more and Elisha knew that God was with him just as He had been with Elijah.

Elisha was now the prophet of God. He showed immediately that God was with him as He had been with Elijah. By the power of God, he turned bad water into good water. He also demonstrated that God's prophet must be respected; as Elisha approached Bethel, some young people mocked him. They shouted, "Go up, you baldhead!" Maybe they had heard the story of Elijah going up to heaven and did not believe it. They teased Elisha and asked him to go up, too. Elisha pronounced a curse on them. Two female bears came out of the forest and wounded 42 of the boys. It is not a good thing to make fun of God's prophet!

One day, the widow of a prophet came to Elisha. Her husband was dead and she was left with two sons. They had to borrow money because they were so poor, but could not repay what they had borrowed. Elisha asked what she had in the house. She told him she had only a little oil. He told her to borrow all the pots and pans she possibly could and pour her oil into the vessels. She did this, and filled one vessel after another. After she did this, Elisha told her to sell the oil, pay her debts and live on the money that was left. This miracle helped confirm Elisha as God's prophet in Israel.

As Elisha went about the country, he often stopped at the house of a woman at the village of Shunem. The woman and her husband built a room on their house just for Elisha. In it they placed a bed, a table, a chair and a candlestick. For her kindness, the Lord granted the woman a son—for she had no children up to this time. About a year later, a baby boy was born. When the boy had grown to be a young lad, he died. The woman of Shunem went to Mount Carmel to find Elisha. When Elisha came to her house, God worked a miracle and restored the boy's life again. This miracle further proved that Elisha was God's prophet.

After that, Elisha was in Gilgal. There, two miracles were done—both of them regarding food. There was a drought in the land and food was scarce. On one occasion a pot of stew was made for the sons of the prophets, but someone brought in a wild gourd and put it into the pot. It was poisonous and the stew could not be eaten! But Elisha, by the power of God worked a miracle, and removed the poison from the stew. On another occasion, a man brought a gift of 20 loaves of bread to Elisha. But there were 100 men present and the 20 loaves were not enough for all of them. Another miracle was performed. When the men had eaten all they wanted, there was bread left over as God had promised Elisha there would be.

Each of these miracles confirmed to the people of Israel that indeed Elisha was truly a prophet of God. No one could work such miracles unless God was with him. It also meant that God was with Israel and that they should listen to

Elisha's words. In spite of their wicked kings, the Israelites were still God's chosen people. It was through the people of Israel that God was going to bring a Savior into the world.