

## Restoration of the Kingdom of God – 23

Of the more remarkable men in Old Testament times, Elijah stands out among the most memorable. In the face of the near total rebellion of his people against God, this man devoted his life to their recovery. Working with God towards this end, he took a cue from **Deuteronomy 11:16-17**, and *“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” - James 5:17.*

- In the *Two Sacrifices* incident on Mount Carmel, Elijah managed to obliterate the priesthood of Baal-worship. But in doing so he earned the burning hatred of Baal’s local protagonist, queen Jezebel, who greeted him with the message, *“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” - 1 Kings 19:2.*

Hearing this, Elijah fled for his life to a remote and uninhabited place, announcing to God that he had enough in his conflict with idolatry. God evidently accepted Elijah’s request to be removed from the front lines of that battle. He was to pass the mantle of leadership among the believers to Elisha.

- Both men then travelled to the centres where the believers evidently lived communally, in Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho. Afterwards, as the two of them were walking along, *“suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” - 2 Kings 2:11.*

Some have taken from this that Elijah went to heaven, the place to which Jesus later ascended, and now lives with God and Jesus, never to die. But a careful reading of Scripture shows that Elijah is not in heaven, nor is he alive now. We also need Scripture’s own definition of *“heaven”*: the **atmosphere**, which it calls heaven, produces rain - **Genesis 8:2**, snow - **Isaiah 55:10** and thunder - **1 Samuel 2:10**.

- In the **space beyond the atmosphere**, which is also called heaven, we mortals can behold the sun, moon and stars - **Deuteronomy 4:19**. The residence of God, who dwells *“in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” - 1 Timothy 6:16*, is also called heaven - **Psalms 115:3**.

Into which of the three heavens of Scripture was Elijah received? Jesus clearly shows that it could not possibly have been the place where God resides - *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” - John 3:13.*

- It is generally believed that John wrote this between AD 80-90. This means that 50 years after the ascension of Jesus, John could write that no other man had ever gone to heaven, except Jesus. This definitely leaves Elijah out - not to speak of all the believers who had died up to that time.

So where did Elijah go? Paul wrote that *“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men” - Romans 5:12*, and this includes Elijah who therefore also **must have died**.

- And when holding up the example of the faithful in Old Testament times, Paul includes Elijah - see **Hebrews 11:35** with **1 Kings 17:22**. In concluding, he says that *“these all”* - including Elijah - *“having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they should not be made perfect”* (Greek *teleioo*, Strong 5048 = to make perfect) *“apart from us” - Hebrews 11:39.*

Jesus, **made immortal**, *“the firstborn from the dead” - Revelation 1:5*, *“learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected”* (Greek *teleioo*) *“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” - Hebrews 5:8.* More next time, God willing.

