

# The Compass

Week 25

OT Readings: 1 Kings 19:1-2 Kings 7:20

NT Readings: Acts 12:1-16:15

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- This week's in 1 Kings continue the focus on the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The book ends with the death of Ahab, one of Israel's wicked kings<sup>1</sup>, who along with his wife Jezebel have plunged Israel into even deeper sin.<sup>2</sup> Elijah resists them.
- The prophetic mantle is transferred from Elijah to Elisha (2 Kings 2). Functioning in the same power as Elijah, he is God's voice and agent to both kings and people.
- Numerous examples are given in these early chapters of 2 Kings of Elisha's powerful actions. If you consider these alongside of what you are reading in the book of Acts, what do you see?

### New Testament

- Acts 12 recounts James martyrdom and Peter's miraculous escape. Acts 12:24 is another summary statement, "the word of the Lord continued to grow..." Despite resistance and even death, the kingdom advances.
- Acts 13-14 tell of Paul's first missionary journey.<sup>3</sup> Although his mission was to the Gentiles, Paul's strategy involved targeting the numerous synagogues scattered throughout the Mediterranean basin. His visit to Psidian Antioch (Acts 13:14f.) is typical of the circumstances he faced and of the message he proclaimed.<sup>4</sup> Acts 14:22 is the great N. T. understatement given what happens in 14:19! Paul's mission was difficult and personally costly.<sup>5</sup>
- The Acts 15 "Council at Jerusalem" is an important turning point in the early church. They concluded that Gentiles need not become Jews to walk with God. The Gospel was now free to cross social/culture boundaries unhindered.
- Acts 15:36 introduces Paul's second missionary journey. What can you learn about being led by God?

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**2 Kings 6:8-23.** Human history is despairingly filled with atrocities and bloodshed; in fact, it often seems the rule rather than the exception. Even among "Christian" nations, too often this has been true.<sup>6</sup> While this is a discouraging fact, perhaps it is only evidence that the kingdom of God has yet to fully come among those so called "Christian." History reveals the power of the gospel to "civilize" humanity, to bring about great good in the midst of terrible evil and to transform individuals, peoples and nations.<sup>7</sup>

This text reveals something wonderful about God and His way of doing things. While the king of Israel sees only the opportunity to destroy his enemies; God sees the opportunity to do something more – turn hearts away from hatred. It illustrates the principle of the "opposite spirit," where we act in ways that are contrary to the way the world around us behaves but which are entirely consistent with God's ways. Like the King we represent and the kingdom of which we are citizens, we seek for a greater good and a new beginning. Yet, we are not hopelessly idealistic. Our kindness may not be met with happy change and repentance; sometimes perhaps, but not always, and as we painfully know not often enough. But we act in faith, confident that whatever we see circumstantially, God is always at work in ways which we cannot see. He loves our enemies and wants to change them even as He has changed us who were once His enemies (Rom. 5:10). Only God can see whole picture. If we are faithful, do what is asked of us, who knows what might be?

## Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

**2 Kings 6:15-17.** The battle is real and there are realities beyond the senses. Elisha could see, though initially his servant could not. In our NT readings this week, we find Peter, James and Paul all engaged in conflict and upheaval. In fact, the whole story of Paul's life could be told from the perspective of one disrupting event to the next. The kingdom of God is about the in-breaking of God's loving, redemptive, healing power; but at the core it is about His

**rule.** He comes to challenge every other authority and every other would be king. And when He comes into the world to reveal His kingship through Elijah or Elisha or Paul or you or me there will be resistance. Those who will submit to no authority but their own will wage war with those who proclaim that Jesus alone is Lord.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible reveals a picture of two kingdoms in conflict over world supremacy, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God. We should not be surprised that when we take seriously our responsibility to be kingdom people and to demonstrate and declare His kingship that we will be resisted, both by human agency and the demonic. The world is a war zone, whether we think so or not, whether we like it or not.<sup>9</sup>

Yet we must never forget, “there are more on our side than on theirs” (2 Kings 6:16). While this does not mean that we will avoid suffering or difficulty (Acts 14:19 – this is war after all), we can be confident that He will sustain us and in the end, *we will win*. Just make sure you’re fighting the right battle!

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### 1 Kings 22:1-40. “Q. Does God deceive people?”

Judah’s king Jehoshaphat having entered into an alliance with Ahab insists that they consult the Lord before following through on their plan to capture the Aramean city of Ramoth-gilead. Promised success by Ahab’s court prophets, (22:6-7) Jehoshaphat discerningly looks for a prophetic voice less compromised.<sup>10</sup> Micaiah predicts the demise of Ahab by revealing events which took place in God’s “heavenly council.”<sup>11</sup> God seeks for someone to go to Ahab and entice him to enter the battle that will lead to his death. A spirit whose plan is to inspire all of Ahab’s prophets to speak lies gets the job because he “will succeed.” (22:22)

The question is whether God is somehow complicit in lying or deception. You could hardly call God a liar or deceiver given that Micaiah gives this word *before* any of the events unfold.<sup>12</sup> It is hard to deceive someone by telling them you are trying to deceive them!<sup>13</sup> In fact, Micaiah’s word is God’s warning to Ahab; apparently repentance is still possible even if remote. However, given Ahab’s settled, wicked and God-resisting character, this word best serves as a pronouncement of judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 16:29-30.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to continuing the idolatrous worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, Ahab marries a Baal worshipper, Jezebel. Ahab’s descendants follow in his wickedness; a daughter will nearly exterminate the Davidic house (2 Kings 11).

<sup>3</sup> Maps are essential to understanding the Bible. While most Bibles have some basic maps, a Bible Atlas will provide more detail. See my resource list:

<sup>4</sup> Notice the reference in 13:16 to “you devout Gentiles who fear God.” Non-Jews who were attracted to Israel’s God often gathered around the Jewish synagogue. Paul’s strategy was to present the truth to “the Jew first” but with the ultimate goal of reaching these Gentiles. Acts 26:16f. Rom. 15:14f. etc.

<sup>5</sup> I have become convinced that Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was the human and demonic resistance which he confronted in his efforts for the gospel, see Acts 20:22-25. His description of his sufferings recounted in 2 Cor. 11:23-29 is only a sampling of what he experienced.

<sup>6</sup> One hardly need cite the examples. Consider only Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Rwanda from the last century.

<sup>7</sup> We are not talking here of some kind of “utopianism,” rather the conviction that truth matters, the Biblical worldview is the worldview that best reflects reality and that a living God is at work to transform. All of this means the very real possibility of real authentic change, even if “perfection” awaits the coming of Jesus and His kingdom finally and completely. Here are several titles that make the case for how Christianity has changed the world for the better: Dr. Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*. Loren Cunningham, *The Book that Transforms Nations*. Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity*. D. James Kennedy, *What If the Bible Had Never Been Written?* America, despite her rabid critics, is an illustration of what is possible. When we see her presently in decline, we must recognize her decision to abandon the Biblical worldview.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:1-7.

<sup>9</sup> These ideas are not new. A recent author who looks at this afresh is Greg Boyd in *Is God to Blame?* and *God at War*.

<sup>10</sup> The court prophets were in the employ of the king; hardly the prophetic voice which challenges the powers that be. Micaiah is YHWH’s voice into this situation.

<sup>11</sup> Several places in the Bible show God in “consultation” with the “hosts of heaven.” The question here is whether this a parable told by Micaiah to predict Ahab’s demise or whether we should take the vision to be an actual picture of an event that occurred in God’s presence. While an argument might be made for the former, the plain reading of the text argues for the later.

<sup>12</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, 238.

<sup>13</sup> However we understand the events that transpire in the “heavenly council,” Ahab still maintains his freedom. He is self-deceived and has surrounded himself with those who will tell him what he wants to hear, even putting their “God-stamp” on it.

