

1 Kings 18-19

The Prophet Elijah vs. The prophets of Baal (18:25)

On top of Mount Carmel Elijah gathered the prophets of Baal, King Ahab, and the representatives of all of the people of the northern kingdom. Elijah told the prophets of Baal to choose their sacrifice, prepare it but not to light the fire. The "storm god" who holds a lightning bolt in his hand should be able to send fire down from the sky to ignite the sacrifice. Elijah allows them to start early, they are calling on Baal all morning until noon – the hottest and driest part of the day. But no one answered with fire. Elijah then began to taunt them asking if their god was sleeping or busy or traveling. Is he paying attention to you and your needs? Does he really care about you, the prophets, or these people? Or is he really a god at all? So the prophets of Baal shouted louder and cut themselves so that their blood would flow like the fire and the rain from the sky. But none of it was to any avail.

It finally came to the time of the evening sacrifice and Elijah calls the people together to watch him. This is all about evidence and he wants them to see and believe. First he repairs the broken down altar with 12 stones. The stones represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Even though the Northern Kingdom had walked away from God and the other two tribes, God still thinks of them in terms of the original covenant and the way he had commanded his people to worship him (altars and the time of sacrifice). After the altar is built and the sacrifice and wood are in place, he commands the people to fill 4 large jars of water and to drench the sacrifice three times. This equals 12 jars of water – again symbolizing the 12 tribes. The altar, the wood, the sacrifice are saturated and the trench he dug is full of water. There is not chance for spontaneous combustion, or for trickery. The heat of the day has passed and there is not a cloud in the sky to send a lightning bolt.

Elijah then stepped forward and prayed to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob so that the people will know that you are God and will turn their hearts back to God. Verse 38 – the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and all the water in the trench. NO QUESTION that God has answered. There was not a little flicker of a flame or a spark – it was a like a 500 lb. bomb fell from heaven and declared God's existence, his care for his people, the authority of his prophet, and his superiority over Baal and all other false gods!

When the people saw this they fell on their faces and cried out that the LORD is God!! Elijah immediately tells the people to seize the 450 prophets of Baal and take them down off of the mountain to the Kishon Valley at the base of the Carmel ridge and slaughter all of the prophets. If God is God then there is no other god and his prophets are false and must be eliminated. This is what the king should have done, but it is the prophet that has to bring order to the situation. Elijah then tells the King to go eat and drink because he is going to have to hustle back to town because the rain is about to come. The prophet then goes back up on the mountain and prays to God and sends his servant 7 times to look off to the west over the Mediterranean Sea to see if there is a cloud. On the seventh time he sees a small cloud the size of a human hand – this is it – the drought is over – He tells the king to put his chariot in gear and get going – Elijah then supernaturally runs faster than the chariot to beat him to Jezreel.

Elijah Flees to Horeb (chapter 19)

Ahab tells Jezebel what Elijah had done to the prophets of Baal and she sent messengers to tell him that she had vowed to kill him. Elijah, instead of trusting in the LORD and remembering that God had just showed himself so powerful on Mt. Carmel, he was filled with fear and started think man's way instead of God's way. As a result he ran away, all the way to the southern part of Judea – to Beersheba. There he left his servant and started off into the desert. He sat down under a tree and prayed to die. He felt alone, exhausted, hungry and in despair. The LORD sends an angel to feed him and allow him to rest. Once his physical needs were dealt with, he traveled to Horeb, the mountain of God. There he has an encounter with the LORD. He complains to God and then God reveals himself to Elijah. In wind, an earthquake, a fire and then a gentle whisper. Notice the symbols in the elements. The wind is the same word in Hebrew as the word for "Spirit." The fire and the earthquake were manifestations of God on Mt. Horeb when Moses was there with the people of Israel. God asks, "What are you doing here?" God asks questions like this of humanity when they are doing things their way. He asked Adam and Eve in the Garden, "Where are you?" when he knew exactly where they were. He is lamenting that he is the only one left but that is really not the case. He doesn't have God's perspective – he is just seeing things like a man. Don't we do the same thing?

This encounter on Mount Horeb is parallel to Moses' encounter to God when he asked to see God face to face and God hid him in the cleft of the rock (Ex. 32) and Moses saw his glory pass by. These two characters, Moses and Elijah show up in the New testament on the Mount of Transfiguration. There Jesus is talking with them and he is Transformed into radiant Glory. The disciples, Peter, James and John saw Jesus reveal his glory just like Moses and Elijah saw the glory of the Lord revealed on the mountain.

God then gives Elijah a list of assignment to do including anointing two kings and then choosing his successor. God then reveals to Elijah that he has 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah was not alone – God had a plan and he had his faithful people who were the remnant. There is always a faithful remnant. Elijah then travels all the way up to Damascus in the north and then back to Israel and finally to Elisha. Elisha is plowing with 12 yoke of oxen and the prophet comes and throws his cloak over him. Elijah's cloak is kind of like Moses' staff. It is the symbol of his powerful anointing by God. Elisha sacrifices the two oxen that he was plowing with and uses the wood from the plow to sacrifice the animals. He then feeds everyone with the meat and leaves to follow Elijah. Doesn't this sound like Jesus' calling of the first disciples who leave their boats and nets and follow him to become fishers of men.