

A Prophet of Fire

1 Kings 18:30-39

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." 32 Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." 34 Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. 35 So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water. 36 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. 37 "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

Ever since I first read this story it has been a favorite of mine. To see truth lined up against falsehood, to see the true God challenge the gods of this world, to see one man of righteousness stand unflinching against 450 prophets of wickedness brings me a sense of excitement and anticipation.

Elijah has been faithful to the Lord and the Lord has watched out for him. First he was kept alive by the brook and then as the guest of a poor widow. Now God appears to Elijah and says it is time to go meet Ahab.

So Elijah arranges a meeting with Ahab as we find earlier in this chapter. Ahab accuses Elijah of bringing trouble on the nation. But the truth is that Ahab by his sin is the troubler of Israel.

Elijah proposes a challenge between himself and the false prophets of the land. It is simple. Since Baal is the god of fire, the sun, the rain and most everything else that blesses their lives, it would be a challenge of fire.

Both groups would build an altar, prepare a sacrifice and then pray to their respective god to send fire to consume the sacrifice. Which ever God answered by fire would be declared the victor and be due all the worship of the people.

The people agree that this is a good plan. Since there are so many of them, Elijah has the false prophets first prepare their sacrifice. Then they begin to call on their god but there is no answer. The call out from morning until mid afternoon.

Elijah is not very kind to them, sometimes mocking their vain efforts.

1 Kings 18:27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.” 28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. NKJV

So let us look at this grand episode in the life of Elijah today.

I. The Troubler of Israel.

A. Long ago the nation had been led into idolatry by Jeroboam the first king of Israel after the kingdom was divided.

B. But then Ahab came along and made things worse.

1. 1 Kings 16:30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him.

2. His daughter married the son of the King of Judah and led that nation into sin as well.

C. It was not Elijah that troubled Israel.

1. God often brings calamity to a nation when it turns away from Him.

2. And often the world thinks of God’s people as being the problem.

3. We have in our nation today a good sized portion that think the country would be so much better off without Christians and the influence they bring on society.

II. Elijah accused the people of faltering between serving the Lord or the Baal.

A. Compromise is not new thing.

1. I see it in Christianity to ever increasing degrees.

2. Some of the forefathers of some of the denominations would not recognize what they help found has become.

3. And even in the better churches we have lowered the standards to the point that many are no more than a social club where the members get together to do good deeds and have a good time.

4. Now, not everything old is good and not everything new is bad.

5. God gave us a book to go by.

6. Every sin that Elijah was trying to counter on Mt Carmel was a transgression of the revealed will of God in His Word.

B. We may live in a pluralistic society but God is no pluralistic God.

1. Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.
- C. The people had not abandoned Jehovah God completely, they has just added another deity to their list of objects of worship.
 - D. In our nation the government, many times through the courts have taken to themselves to define what constitutes a proper religion.
 - E. Our greatest threat seems to me to be our new national religion of the secular state.
 1. Every week it seems I read of one of the branches of the armed forces removing Bibles availability to the troops or of some school telling a six year old that she can’t put Jesus on her poster in art class.
 2. I used to hear about things like that happening all the time in government, in the governments of the communist countries.
- III. The challenge
- A. It was simple.
 1. Why fire and not water.
 2. Well you see if this is not played out correctly the false prophets will turn it for their own use.
 3. So the contest must be simple but decisive.
 - B. It would be conclusive.
 1. They would go first.
 2. Elijah gave them all day do get it done.
 3. It would be something that would be difficult to fake.
 - C. Elijah removes all doubt.
 1. He has them dump 12 barrels of water on the sacrifice.
 2. He was miking it difficult for God but for the false prophets.
- IV. The failure of the false prophets.
- A. 1 Ki 18:26–29 26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us!” But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. 27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.” 28 So they cried

aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

- V. The power of the true God.
 - A. It was immediate.
 - B. It was powerful.
 - C. It was conclusive.
 - D. It demanded action
 - 1. They took the false prophets and killed them.
 - 2. They lived under a different set of rules than we do.

There is but one true God.

Those who follow Him need not compromise in order to make others feel better about themselves.

The way that leads to life is narrow and few find it.

The way that leads to death is broad and varied and many follow it.

That day Carmel witnessed one of the grandest scenes in the history of Israel. Three such scenes on mountain-tops stand out before the mind: the first on Mount Sinai, when the Covenant was made by the ministry of Moses; the second on Mount Carmel, when the Covenant was restored by the ministry of Elijah; the third on “the Mount of Transfiguration,” when Moses and Elijah bare worshipful witness to the Christ in Whom and by Whom the Covenant was completed, transfigured, and transformed. *Edersheim, A. (1997). Bible History: Old Testament (Vol. 6, p. 13). Oak Harbor: Logos Bible Software.*

The misguided actions of the prophets serve to remind us of a very important truth. Faith and sincerity in religious worship do not insure that one’s worship is acceptable. No one could deny that they had faith! No one could fault them for not being sincere! The only problem is that their faith was in the wrong object and they were sincerely wrong! *Varner, W. (1984). The chariot of Israel: exploits of the prophet Elijah (1st ed.). West Collingswood, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.*

The Apostle Paul did not fault the sincerity of his unbelieving Jewish brethren, but their zeal did

not merit salvation. “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”(Rom. 10:2–3). How true is the old saying, “The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” *Varner, W. (1984). The chariot of Israel: exploits of the prophet Elijah (1st ed.). West Collingswood, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.*

Why was he stirring up others into a protest movement? Why could not Baal-worship be indulged in by those who liked it? Why could they not combine some "nice features" of Baal-worship into the worship of the Lord? Why is Elijah rocking the boat, "troubling" Israel? This is Ahab's position. *Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.*

2 Kings 17:33 (NKJV) 33 They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods--according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

