

The Ravens Of Elijah

I Kings 18:19-21

19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

At the beginning of this story, Elijah has declared a drought at the beginning of chapter 17. This is significant because Baal is the Canaanite god of storms.

He is often depicted carrying a lightning bolt in his hands. By declaring that there shall be no rain, Elijah is outright challenging Baal to a duel.

Since Ahab and Jezebel have declared that all of Israel is safe as a result of their declaration of Baal worship as the state religion, it is also putting Ahab in a bad political position; if his official god of rain and storms can not make rain, then perhaps Ahab himself is not protected by his chosen deity either. What good is a god of rain that cannot make rain?

When we pick up the story in chapter 18, the drought has been going on for 3 years. The people of Israel are becoming desperate. As a direct consequence, then Ahab and Jezebel are also becoming desperate.

The Bible speaks of Jezebel killing off the prophets of God. Even Elijah has been hiding out from Jezebel. Notice where God tells Elijah to go: east of the Jordan.

He went right into the heart of Baal country, far from Israel, the place where God provides.

His first stop is at Cherith, an oasis with a stream.

At Cherith, Elijah is fed by Ravens (17:5). This is doubly unheard of for a prophet of the Lord since ravens are unclean animals (Levites 11:15) and he eats bread and meat of unknown origin (Leviticus 7:24).

Yet Elijah eats of the un-kosher food in a land outside the bounds of the Promised Land because that is where God has directed him.

How often do we assume that we have miss-read the will of God because we are in a place that we “know” is wrong?

Once the stream dries up, Elijah goes to Zerephath of Sidon. This is the very heart of Jezebel’s birthplace. Yet Elijah does not find himself at odds with the woman God has sent him to.

Instead he finds a woman willing to give up her last meal in order to feed the prophet of a God whom she does not know. By doing so she manages to have enough to eat so that the prophet, herself, and her son survive the drought.

Elijah eats with the woman, an intimate act that represents friendship. By making a friendship with the woman, Elijah eventually saves her son from death.

When the woman, who likely was a worshiper of Baal herself, sees that her son has been saved, she comes to believe in the God of Elijah.

Keep in mind that as a non-Jew, she has no way to partake of the Temple worship of God or to benefit from His miracles, but through Elijah she sees a great miracle in her life.

As we journey through our lives, our job is to likewise bring the blessings of the Lord to those unable to partake of those blessings themselves.

At the beginning of chapter 18, God has told Elijah that it is time to end the famine. So Elijah finds Ahab, who has also been out looking for Elijah.

Elijah brings the stalemate to a head by challenging Baal to a very public duel.

I Kings 18:22

22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:

24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

So in this story, Elijah is challenging Baal to the very act that he is supposed to be the master of bringing fire down from heaven.

The prophets of Baal are to place their bull on some wood. As they pray to Baal, he should easily hear their cries and take one of the lightning bolts in his hands and throw it to the ground.

Notice, Elijah places himself at an additional disadvantage by letting the prophets of Baal go first.

The contest is, "first one to light a fire wins." But Elijah does not begin his prayer. He is so confident in his God that he gives the Baal prophets an unencumbered head start in the contest.

So often we are so insecure in our own place with God that we are not content to stand by and let Him work – or not work as He sees fit. It is not always that we doubt Him; rather it is that we doubt ourselves.

We fear that we may have misunderstood His Word. We may have committed God to something he did not intent for us to do.

We fear that we did not hear the Word of the Lord correctly, and so we are not content to wait for Him to act.

We jump in too soon and thwart His timing. We need to learn to wait.

I Kings 18:25

25 And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.

26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

Things are not going well for the prophets of Baal. Their god has not answered their fervent prayers. Try as they might, no lightning from heaven came down to light the fire of wood that was extremely dry since it had not seen water for three years.

Baal did not need a big fire to light this altar, just a small spark. But because there was no Baal to answer, there was no spark to light the dead, dry wood.

A common phrase uttered during Baal worship is "Where is Baal?" In the Biblical text it is rendered as "O Baal, here us." Either way, the Canaanite words represented here are, "Jeze Baal," the name of Ahab's wife Jezebel. In other words, the prophets were shouting "Jezebel, Jezebel."

I Kings 18:27

27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

29 And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

Now Elijah is just getting cocky.

He starts making fun of them. “Maybe Baal is asleep.” If this were true it would imply that Baal, like human beings, has attributes and failings like humans.

It is no coincidence that God told mankind in the second commandment, “Though shalt not make any graven images.” Why? Because given half a chance, we will always make our gods in the image of ourselves rather than to make ourselves into the image of God.

The worshipers of Baal had done just this; they had made a god like themselves: one that needed sleep and could not be bothered to help mankind.

I Kings 18:30

30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto 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, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:

32 And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.

33 And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.

Remember, we are three years into a drought.

I Kings 18:34:

34 And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time.

35 And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

Elijah is going to leave no doubt as to the source of this miracle.

This is not an accidental spark that ignites this bonfire. No spontaneous combustion here. No, this fire is from one place.

He even causes the people to bring him the one thing more precious to them than anything else; water.

But he does not ask for some water, he wants it all. He only asks for one bull, but three containers of water. So much that it overflows and fills the trench.

I Kings 18:36-37

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 of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

Note the reason that Elijah gives for why God should answer his prayer; so that the people will know that he is acting according to God's Will, and so that the people will know that the LORD is God.

God does not give you what you ask, for your reason. God gives you something for His reason. If it shows His power in order to save the lost and cause them to believe, then He will do it.

I Kings 18:38-39

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

One interesting note is that “The LORD, he is God” in Hebrew is “Elijah.” So the people were shouting “Elijah, Elijah.”

I do not believe that there were shouting the name of the prophet. Even though the scripture does not explicitly say this, I personally believe that Elijah got his name as a direct result of this event.

In any event, there is an interesting juxtaposition of the character names here in the story.

The prophets of Baal have spent all day shouting “Jezebel” to no effect only to have the people shout, “Elijah” when the true God is finally revealed.

I Kings 18:40

40 And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

So Elijah takes advantage of his recent victory to get rid of some false prophets. But the miracle does not end there. The God of Elijah has one more trick to rub Baal’s face in.

I Kings 18:41-46

41 And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,

43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not.

45 And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

So the God of Israel, the God of Elijah, shows the god of the weather who is boss.

Not only does he call fire down so hot that it wipes up the sacrifice, rocks, and water, he also releases a downpour that nearly threatens to overtake Ahab and Elijah.

I Kings 19:1-4

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

3 And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Is this the same man? How is it that a man that called fire and rain from heaven would run like a little child from Jezebel?

The answer is that the first Elijah is Elijah the Man of God.

As the Man of God:

- Elijah can do great miracles.

- He can stand at the top of the mountain and mock the prophets of Baal.
- He can pray prayers that bring down fire.
- He can demand that the people kill false prophets.

But as Elijah the man:

- He is scared and lonely.
- He runs from Jezebel into Judah.
- He fires his servant and asks the Lord to take his life.

This reaction is more common than most people are probably aware of.

Anyone who has been raised in a preacher's family is well aware of this reaction. A minister can get up in the pulpit and, when the Spirit of the Lord descends on him, he can call fire down out of heaven.

People pray, shout, run the aisles, speak in tongues, do all the things that Pentecostals do. When they leave the church, they leave tired satisfied, and usually hungry.

But the preacher, he leaves exhausted and vulnerable. He wonders if he did enough, if he said enough, if he said too much. Because when the Spirit leaves him, he is just like Elijah.

The devil will immediately begin to attack. The devil cannot attack when the Spirit is upon him.

When anointed, the preacher is a fierce warrior. But when church is over, he is vulnerable. Anyone who grew up with a preacher father is familiar with the after-church blues.

It is often the job of the preacher's family to comfort him until he is strong enough to resist the devil on his own again.

Pray for our Pastor, church.

- Every time we leave church fed, he leaves it empty.
- When leave it spiritually armored, he leaves spiritually naked.

Pray that, like Elijah, the Lord will send ravens to comfort our Pastor.

Pray for his family that they will have the strength to stand around him when the attacks come.