



Lessons from Elijah's Life

The Mt. Carmel Challenge

Date: 19 February 2020

Text: 1 Kings 18:17-24

Key Lesson: Evil influences are corrupting.

Ahab Blames Elijah

Ahab failed to realise that Elijah was the best friend Israel had at that time. Evil influences had turned his heart away from God. Elijah was willing to stand up for God and tell Ahab and all Israel the truth. Instead of appreciating the words of God's preacher, Ahab hated both the preacher and his message. If God's man is telling you clearly what God said in His Word, do not get angry with the preacher.

The first words from Ahab's mouth to Elijah are words of angry blame. He blamed Elijah for the drought. He was angry that it was so hot and dry. He was bitter that some of his precious horses and mules had died. Ultimately, he was angry with God. The 3 ½ years of drought had not changed Ahab's wicked heart one bit. He was not the slightest humbled by God's chastening. Ahab did not kill Elijah on the spot probably because deep within he knew that since Elijah started the drought only he could end it.

Blaming others is never the answer to our problems. As long as we blame our sinful reactions on those who irritated us, we will never get to the root of the problem. A preacher told of a man who was having serious problems in his THIRD marriage. He told his pastor, "I cannot believe that I married the 'same kind' of woman all three times." When confronted about his contribution to the problem, he was not willing to admit that his harsh, unloving spirit had turned all three women against him. We must not be a blame-shifter like Ahab!

Elijah's Response

Notice Elijah's bold answer (v.18). He said, "I have not troubled Israel." Then he identified the root of the problem. God held Ahab responsible for the spiritual leadership of Israel. He was a wicked man. His father, Omri, had been the most evil king in Israel (1Ki 16:25). Because of the evil influence of a godless father, like-father-like-son, Ahab had no love for the LORD either. In fact God tells us that Ahab surpassed his father in wickedness (1Ki 16:30, 33). Men, your greatest role as a husband is to love your wife as Christ loves you with no bitterness (Col 3:19). After that, your greatest ministry in life is to rear your children for the Lord. Pursuing your career, hobbies, and pleasures must take a backseat to your responsibility as a father. Your children depend on you to be their mentor. You must walk in harmony with the Lord before you can lead them on such journey.

One of Ahab's greatest sins was to marry wicked, unsubmitive, Jezebel, a pagan from Zidon. She brought into their home and dynasty a passion for her filthy god, Baal. She determined to rid Israel of Jehovah worship and replace it with Baal worship. Ahab, being a weak leader, was afraid to stand up to Jezebel. As a milquetoast husband, he let her have her way. Together they forsook the LORD's commandments, followed Baalim and sought to take all of Israel with them. "There always has been, and there always will be a price to pay for sin (Gal. 6:7-9). You never get away with it!"¹

When God deals with our sins, He rejects our blame shifting and gets right to the heart of the problem. Rather than pointing the finger at others, God insists that we look at our own heart. If we will biblically repent and correct our own sinful actions, we can then see clearly and have the wisdom of God to know how we can help others involved. Jesus taught, (Matthew 7:3-5) "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Elijah's Command

Read his command in 1 Kings 18:19-20. Elijah, the servant of God, boldly commanded Ahab to send a command to all in Israel. He was to gather all Israel to meet Elijah on Mount Carmel. Elijah specifically required that the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the groves be present. Evidently, Elijah did not mention outline his challenge until all Israel arrived on the mount. It probably took several days for everyone to get the news and make the trip.

Pulpit Commentary describes Mount Carmel as rather a ridge than a mountain, some twelve miles in length ^[19 km]. Its highest point, 1728 feet ^[527m] above the sea level, is about four miles ^[6 km] from its eastern extremity, which, at an elevation of 1600 feet ^[487m], rises like a wall from the great plain of Esdraelon. It was on that mountain that all Israel was to gather.



¹ Pastor Alan Carr, https://www.sermonnotebook.org/elijah/1%20Kings%2018_16a-40.htm

Elijah's Challenge

Elijah came unto all the people (v.21). We must remember that he is now talking to thousands of people. He must have had a powerful voice. He asked them how long they would continue to waver in their opinion. They must stop this wavering and make their choice between Jehovah and Baal. The word "halt" means to hop back and forth. Evidently, many of the people were still pretending to worship the LORD one day and then going to worship Baal the next day. The LORD is a jealous God. He will never share His glory with another god. (Exodus 34:14) "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:" (Isaiah 48:11) "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another." If you are bobbing back and forth acting religious at church and living for self during the week, God is not pleased. Mixing truth and error, good and evil is like creating rat bait. It is deadly. God had John write this warning to the lukewarm church of Laodicea, (Revelation 3:15-16) "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." God wants your whole heart.

Notice that the people answered him not a word. They were not prepared to admit their guilt. They were enjoying the sensual pleasures of worshipping Baal. Sin is pleasurable for a season, and then it always turns and bites the sinner.

Though he was bold, Elijah felt terribly alone and outnumbered (v.22). He stood that day on that lofty ridge with no support from any human. The prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty. It was not until later that God told him of 7,000 others who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There are times when we feel the same way. You may not know any other Christian at your work. You may be the only Christian family on your street. You may not have any Christian friends at school. When you feel that way, here are two things to consider. There may be other Christians around you that you have not yet met. You have God with you and you and God form a majority. (Romans 8:31) "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Ponder the words in (Psalms 118:6) "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

Elijah's Contest

Finally, Elijah explains the rules for his contest (v.23-24). The 450 prophets of Baal were to provide two young bulls for the sacrifice. They were to choose the one they wanted, cut it in pieces, place it on dry wood, but put no fire under. After waiting his turn, Elijah would dress his young bull, lay it on wood, and put no fire under. For emphasis, Elijah repeated the fact that no fire could be placed under the sacrifices (1Ki 18:23, 25). Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges states, "Deceit was largely practised in the heathen temples and sacrifices represented as miraculously consumed, for the accomplishment of which preparation was made in the ground beneath the altar." There was to be no cheating in this contest.

We must be careful today. The devil has many deceivers and charlatans who are actively seeking to deceive careless naive Christians. The devil is a master at the craft and he equips his human ministers. (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." We must stay close to the Lord. We must beware! (Colossians 2:8) "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Daily ask God for His wisdom and discernment. (James 1:5) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Practice (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22) "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."

As soon as Elijah presented his challenge, all the people answered (1Ki 18:24). When Elijah confronted their hopping between two opinions, they were silent. Now that they recognised that he was presenting a reasonable contest, they quickly said, "It is well spoken." Notice that it was not the prophets of Baal who agreed, but all the people. Perhaps the prophets of Baal, who had been accustomed to deceiving the people, could see they were being forced into a trap. However, they had no choice at this point. They must do their best to call down fire from heaven through their false god Baal.

Challenge for us Today

In this lesson, we have seen the corruption in Ahab's life because of the evil influence of his godless father. We have mentioned the evil influence of his wicked wife. Young men, to avoid marrying a Jezebel, do not even consider any young woman who does not have a clear testimony of salvation and who does not love the Lord with all her heart (Amo 3:3). When you find a wholehearted Christian, evaluate carefully her character. Her character (good or bad) will far outlast her beauty. Keep your friendship absolutely pure. Be sure you are in doctrinal harmony. Be sure she is teachable. Be sure you agree on God's biblical child-training philosophy. Evaluate her submissiveness and that of her mother. Find out her goals in life and be sure they are in harmony with God's will for your life. It is far better to be single than to marry a Jezebel! (A young lady needs to be equally cautious when considering a young man for husband). Ahab and Jezebel's rotten influence led the people of Israel had turned from loyalty to God to mixing Baal worship with Jehovah worship. As He always is, God was right when He said, (1 Corinthians 15:33) "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."