

11. A rumble on the Mount

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Most people would like to be liked more than they would like to be right. That is the precise reason why many people want to go with crowd than stand up alone for what is right against all odds. General Omar Bradley from WWII defined bravery as “the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death.” It is not easy to stand tall and alone when everyone around you is hunker down and against you.

One of the highlights of the OT would be the confrontation between prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. It was a major rumble on the Mount – 850 idol worshipers and the wimpy king Ahab against one lone godly prophet Elijah. That reminds me what American Abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, “One and God make a majority.” It took Elijah faith in God, an obedient heart and courage to stand up against these people who were more than willing to kill him in a heartbeat without blinking their eyes.

A. THE TIME TO MEET AHAB

1 Kings 18:1-16 And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.” 2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. 3 And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. 4 For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.) 5 And Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock.” 6 So they divided the land between them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. 7 Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, “Is that you, my lord Elijah?” 8 And he answered him, “It is I. Go, tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’ ” 9 So he said, “How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? 10 As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, ‘He is not here,’ he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. 11 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here” ’! 12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. 13 Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? 14 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here.” ’ He will kill me!” 15 Then Elijah said, “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.” 16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

The drought lasted three and one-half years by the fervent prayer of Elijah. But the drought did not begin or end as a result of Elijah’s will, but at God’s will.

Right after he passed the message to Ahab, God told Elijah to hide himself. Now it was time to present himself. There is a time to hide and be alone with God, and there is also a time to present ourselves to the world.

Here is an interesting person we meet – Obadiah. Would he be the same person who wrote the Book of Obadiah? It is a little difficult to be absolutely positive about him. Because there were 13 Obadiahs in the OT. The Hebrew name Obadiah means “Worshippers of Yahweh” or “Servant of Yahweh.” Since we don’t know which Obadiah this guy is, maybe we can call him “Obi Wan”.

However, he was a courageous servant of God. He feared the Lord and took care of one hundred godly prophets by putting them in two caves and fed them while his crazy king Ahab and his mucho loco wife Jezebel were killing all the godly prophets around the kingdom.

Ahab was such a twisted character. He was looking for grass to feed mules and horses, he was not concerned about the people in his kingdom.

As we read, during the three years Ahab had been searching for Elijah rather than repenting from his wicked sins. Ahab wanted to kill the messenger Elijah for the drought that came because of his, his wife’s and his people’s sins. That makes a perfect sense, huh?

We often do the same thing. In spite of the warnings from the Word of God, we do what we want to do. To get our attention, the Lord sends calamities in our ways. Instead of repenting, we often want to put blame on somebody including God. The Lord will not let up until we truly repent from our sins.

B. A MESSAGE TO AHAB

1 Kings 18:17-19 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” 18 And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

The real troubler was Ahab himself, not Elijah. But in a way I can understand where his false logic came from. Ahab believed that Elijah had angered his sky-god Baal, so this false god supposedly withheld rain until Elijah was caught and executed.

Mount Carmel was located near the border of Israel and Phoenicia, so it was a good place for the Phoenician god Baal to meet Jehovah, the God of Israel. Elijah told Ahab to bring not only the 450 prophets of Baal but also the 400 prophets of the Asherah, the idols that represented Baal’s “wife.” The true God of Israel would take on the husband and wife pagan idol team.

C. GIVE YOUR BEST SHOT, BAAL

1 Kings 18:20-29 So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. 21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord; but

Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. 23 Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. 24 Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken." 25 Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." 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.

When I have a lunch in Jerry Bob's or Triple Plays or even Quail Creek restaurant, the food I choose is so predictable that the people whom we go with and waiters or waitresses know what I am going to have – a cheeseburger. If I am in really different mood, I venture to go for a French Dip. Even though I am usually decisive, I cannot make up my mind when I stand in front of clothing racks in WalMart.

That's how it was with Israel in Elijah's day. For 85 years, the nation had gone back and forth between false gods and the true God. Not wanting to be responsible or live under absolutes of the true God, they would follow pagan gods. Then they would reap the results of following those false gods and would scurry back to the Lord and say they were sorry until their problems went away. Then they would go back like wayward children and do the same thing again. Every time they were on the brink of destruction, God would be merciful and forgive them.

Moses posed a similar question to Israel when they worshiped the golden calf:
Exodus 32:26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side--come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

His successor Joshua also challenged Israel:

Joshua 24:15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The people in America are no different than the wishy washy people of the ancient Israel. When wars break out, terrorist attacks happen, enormous natural disasters occur, people turned to the Lord. Less than two weeks, their lives would go back to business as usual.

Jesus give us a choice to make – one or another, not both, no neutral ground to stand. We have to choose which one to follow. By the way, this applies to the majority of our decisions we make.

Matthew 12:30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

God's response for our lukewarm attitude is very graphic:

Revelation 3:16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

These Baal priests had a better chance of getting a response from a brick wall than Baal, because true Baal didn't exist. It was nothing more than another name for satan. God was not about to let satan come up with any trick at this time.

Elijah was having a good 'ol time in mocking these Baal priests. I really like New Living Translation version:

1Kings 18:27 About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!"

When Elijah said he was the only prophet of the Lord, he wasn't forgetting the prophets that Obadiah had hidden and protected. He meant he was the only one openly serving the Lord.

In v28, we see these prophets cutting themselves and bleeding as their custom. The idea is that the practice of self-inflicted wounds to arouse Baal's pity or response. How tragic that is! They worshiped the gods who required their blood, but our God bleed for us. While other gods demand, "Do this and do that," our Lord said, "It is finished." Which one is better God for us?

At three o'clock, the time of the evening sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, Elijah stepped forward and took charge.

D. THE LORD IS GOD

1 Kings 18:30-40 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!" 40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.

Some Bible critics demand an answer about the water they poured on Elijah's altar, "Where could they get that much water during the three year drought?" I don't know. But the Bible says that they had it and that is good enough for me.

V36 should speak to all of us. Elijah didn't come up with a clever game plan against the Baal priest or presume what God should do for him. Rather he simply obeyed the Lord for this showdown with Baal and its priests.

If we do everything according to His commands, we can be sure that God is going to take care of the result better than we can possibly imagine. He would never let hang us high and dry after He tells us to do something. Our God never fails.

Elijah's prayer had lasted less than a minute but produced spectacular results. But the people's response was momentary persuasion. This was no lasting revival in Israel.

E. THE DROUGHT ENDS

1 Kings 18:41-46 Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, 43 and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again." 44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.' " 45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. 46 Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Elijah stood tall in front of the wicked king and 850 pagan priests, but in the presence of God, he humbled himself to the ground.

Unlike the answer to the prayer at the altar, the answer to this prayer didn't come at once. He continued to pray until the answer came from the Lord. This is a good example for us to follow as we "watch and pray" and continue to intercede until the Lord sends the answer.

It was an obviously supernaturally empowered 14-mile cross-country run. We don't know why the Lord wanted Elijah to be there before Ahab, so that is good enough for us.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When the Lord sends difficulties to us to get our attention, the best thing for us to do is submit to His mercy and love instead of resisting.
- 2) Before we make a decision or take an action, see if what we are about to do would glorify the Lord.
- 3) If we do everything according to His commands, we can be sure that God is going to take care of the result better than we can possibly imagine. He would never let hang us high and dry after He tells us to do something. Our God never fails.