

Did Elijah Persecute the Prophets of Baal?

1 Kings 18:38-40; Romans 13:4

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Is it persecution when the civil magistrate lawfully restrains and punishes murderers, rapists, thieves, and perjurers? Of course not! God has established civil government for that very reason (Romans 13:4)? If God ordained civil government to be His minister (“the minister of God to thee for good”) so as to restrain and punish him that doeth evil, there must be a righteous standard that measures what is good and what is evil. And there is—it is the infallible and unchangeable Moral Law of God imprinted upon the heart of man from creation (Romans 2:15) and especially summarized in the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5:17-19). What is agreeable to the Ten Commandments is good. What is contrary to the Ten Commandments is therefore evil. When that which is good according to God’s Law is defended, it is right. When that which is evil according to God’s Law is punished, it is also right.

Are worship of false gods, blasphemy against the triune God of the Bible, and the practice of false religion violations of the same Moral Law of God (summarized in the Ten Commandments) as murder, rape, theft, and perjury? Yes they are. Then in all consistency and justice these violations against the Lord God should likewise be restrained and punished by civil government as much as murder, rape, theft, and perjury (Matthew 22:36-40). If nations that are enlightened by Scripture do not defend the honor and supreme right of the Triune God of the Bible, why should we expect them to defend the honor and civil rights of man who is made in His image? We shouldn’t, which is why we see increasingly the trampling upon the civil rights of people because the divine rights of Almighty God are ignored, resisted, and despised.

What does all this have to do with Elijah? The question arises, “Did Elijah persecute the prophets of Baal when he commanded that they be executed for leading God’s people from God and into Baal worship?” He did not as we shall see from God’s Word today. The main points are the following: (1) God Is a Consuming Fire (1 Kings 18:38-39); (2) Restraining and Punishing Evil Is Not Persecution (1 Kings 18:40).

I. God Is a Consuming Fire (1 Kings 18:38-39).

A. One of the greatest and momentous displays of God’s awesome power is about to fall from heaven as Elijah has prayed and called for the Lord God to make His glorious name known and received among the people of Israel. Let us look on as Jehovah powerfully demonstrates that He alone is the one true living God.

1. Whereas the prophets of Baal had spent 6 hours crying out that Baal would send fire to consume their sacrifice (even cutting themselves with knives), in answer to the one brief prayer of Elijah that exalted the Lord God above all, God, who is a consuming fire, sends fire from above.

a. Dear ones, it is not the length of your prayer or the emotions and tears that God seeks in your prayer, but a broken and contrite heart that looks in faith to Him as the God who works what is impossible to man. God hears the unutterable cries of His beloved children who may not even be able to express in words their need of Him in times of desperation and darkness that surround them.

b. Elijah was greatly outnumbered—one against hundreds and thousands—yet he stood faithful and would not surrender or compromise the truth of Scripture even though none would come and stand with him. God did not forsake Him, and neither will He forsake you, dearly beloved of the Lord.

2. “Then the fire of the LORD fell” (1 Kings 18:38). It fell from heaven. It was like a bolt of lightning that fell suddenly and powerfully from heaven above. This was not an illusion or a sleight of hand that Elijah had up his sleeve. There was no doubt from whence came the fire—it fell from the Lord God

Almighty above. Perhaps you have seen videos that have captured the suddenness and power of a bolt of lightning in striking a tree. The power is shocking. I am awe-struck at God's power. This was even a greater act of God's power that occurred on Mt. Carmel (as we shall see).

3. This fire from the Lord Almighty in heaven "consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones (12 large stones), and the dust, and licked up the water (12 barrels of water) that was in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38). There has never been anything recorded of which I am aware that had the supernatural force of this fire. This was undeniably sent by the only true God. This is the God who answers by fire. This is the sovereign God who rules over all that He has created. Can you imagine seeing one second the altar of 12 large stones, filled with wood, the bloody sacrifice upon it, and the water that had drenched the sacrifice, wood, stones, and had filled the trench around it, and then the next second seeing this all-consuming fire from heaven consume everything, leaving nothing at all?

a. Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). He is an absolutely holy God who is rightly jealous that we love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He is a protective fire to His people (Exodus 14:24). He is a consuming fire to His enemies (2 Kings 1:9-14).

b. All of Israel gathered there on Mt. Carmel deserved to be consumed by the fire of God that fell from heaven, but God sent it rather to consume the sacrifice offered on behalf of all who would look in faith to the Lord (a type of Jesus Christ). Here is displayed the amazing mercy and grace of Jesus Christ to undeserving sinners like you and me. Even the prophets of Baal were not immediately slain by the fire. They were given the same miraculous sign to look in faith to the God who answers by fire, but they did not do so.

B. The people of Israel (not the prophets of Baal) fell on their faces before the Lord, and cried out, "The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God" i.e. the one and only true God (1 Kings 18:39).

1. Their outward profession was true and faithful. They were immediately shocked and awed by the almighty power of the one true living God. But how many were truly converted and evidenced true faith by loving obedience to God's commands and an earnest desire and commitment to tear down the idols of Baal and reform the religion in Israel? We don't know, but we do know that there were no lasting results by way of reformation in Israel. God continued to send His prophets to call Israel to repentance, but Israel did not turn and God eventually sent the Assyrians as the rod of His hand to remove them from the land.

2. You may say, "I would have believed if I had seen that fire fall from heaven. In saying that, you are merely making excuses for your unbelief because God did send that fire as is recorded in His Word and you still do not believe.

3. The enemies of Jesus also said to Him, "Come down from the cross and we will believe you are the Son of God". And yet when He did something even more miraculous (He came to life after being crucified and buried in a tomb for three days), they covered and denied the truth by saying His disciples came secretly while the Roman soldiers slept and quietly removed the great stone and took His body from the grave, declaring that Jesus was raised from the tomb.

4. What about you? Will you hear the gospel of Jesus that He was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead and outwardly profess, "He is Lord and Savior", but not bow your heart in faith before Him and repent of your sin and rebellion against Him and endeavor new obedience? Anyone can give some outward profession of faith, but only those who are justified by faith alone will live that faith and love out in their lives, in their families, at work, and in the church.

II. Restraining and Punishing Evil Is Not Persecution (1 Kings 18:40).

A. Whereas the people of Israel fell upon their faces and professed Jehovah as God alone, the prophets of Baal did not fall upon their faces and profess Jehovah (they are excluded from the rest of the people); and therefore as those who misled and deceived Israel into the false religion of Baal worship, Elijah

(at the command of the Lord, 1 Kings 18:36) commands that they be taken and executed on the spot. The question is, “Did Elijah persecute the prophets of Baal in not tolerating their false religion, but actually commanding that they be executed for a capital crime?” Let’s define persecution biblically.

1. According to God’s Holy Word, persecution can only be committed against those professing and practicing the truth and righteousness of Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible (Matthew 5:10-11). Notice it is not persecution when one suffers for the sake of a false religion, or for the sake of any sin or error. It is persecution when one suffers for the sake of Christ, for His righteousness, and for His truth revealed in Scripture (1 Peter 4:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:12).

2. Was it persecution when God commanded rulers to execute those who were guilty of leading the people within a covenanted nation away from the one true God and religion and into a false religion (Deuteronomy 13:1-5)? Absolutely not! Was it persecution when Jesus used a whip to drive the money changers out of the temple, not once but twice (John 2:13-16; Matthew 21:12-13)? Was it persecution when Peter pronounced the death sentence over Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10)? Was it persecution when Paul blinded the false prophet, Elymas, who withstood the truth of the gospel (Acts 13:6-12)? Then it wasn’t persecution when Elijah commanded that the false prophets of Baal be slain (1 Kings 18:40)? These were not examples of people suffering persecution, but rather were examples of God’s righteous judgment falling upon the wicked for leading others away from God and His truth. These were pictures of God’s final judgment—He is a consuming fire.

3. The popular view of persecution that sees any restraint or punishment against one who is standing for what he believes (regardless of what false religion is being advocated and what blasphemy is brought against the Lord God) and is leading others to follow him is entirely unbiblical and wrong. This false view of persecution is based upon the equally false view that there is some inherent right to practice whatever false religion one chooses and to lead others to follow in that same false religion.

a. Dear ones, God has never granted any such alleged right to practice a false religion or to lead others into it. To the contrary, the Moral Law of God (God’s revealed will and divine commandment) states: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3); Thou shalt not make any graven image to be used in worship (Exodus 20:4-6); Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain (Exodus 20:7); Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8-11). Will you bow down to the First Amendment or to the First Commandment?

b. You are not to take the law into your own hands (vigilantes), but you ought to pray that the Lord would bring reformation to your land wherein the Law of God would be the established as supreme law of the land and not a man-made Constitution that does not even acknowledge God, Jesus Christ, the Law of God, or the one true Christian and Reformed Religion of the Bible.

4. This is not some new and radical position. Note the clear statement of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (23:3):

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.

B. Can this biblical role of a Christian magistrate in a Christian and covenanted nation be abused? Certainly! Civil government is not to be the thought police. Due process is to be followed with credible witnesses and presumption of innocence as biblical standards of justice. Likewise, only the most aggravated violation of idolatry issued in death. It was the unrepentant false prophets of Baal that were executed—not

the people.

1. The biblical role and lawful authority of a husband, parent, employer, or minister can be abused. However, the possibility of abuse of that which is good and authorized by God is no valid reason to remove that which is good. Otherwise, we would not eat, drink, work, recreate, own, love, or even worship, because all these good things can be abused. That which is good and lawful is not to be removed because it can and is at times abused, but is rather to be used lawfully to the glory of God—as is lawful authority in upholding God’s Moral Law and in restraining and punishing those who resist and rebel against it.

2. The enforcement of God’s Moral Law is not cruel or unfair. Upholding and applying God’s Moral Law is rather perfectly just and good, for it preserves society, restrains evil that destroys society, and promotes the glory of God. But a nation will never reach such a place apart from a spiritual transformation and reformation within the hearts of its citizens, within families, and within the church.

3. In other words, without first the gospel of Jesus Christ being faithfully proclaimed and received by a nation, without a nation covenanting to God to be a Christian nation (renewing the Solemn League and Covenant), there will never be such a reformation. It is the pure gospel that must be preached first and last. The sacrifice must first be consumed and the people fall upon their face and cry out to the Triune God, “The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.” Then that nation is ready to remove the false prophets of Baal. Amen.

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