

Elijah and Elisha

2—Calling People to God 1 Kings 18

Here is a stirring story. Elijah confronts his king and country calling them to acknowledge that the Lord is God—not their idols. It is stirring, not so much because of the drama but because of the concern that Elijah has for his country. He wants them to know God.

We also are stirred because we see the need for this in our own churches and in our country. Do folks who sit in church know their God and love and trust him? Do folks in the world know what manner of God they are rejecting when they call themselves atheists? We long for God presence and times of refreshing in our day (Acts 3:19f).

The situation—then and now

There has been no rain for 42 months. Ahab and his chief of staff are scouting for grass.

- ▣ There is pain and numbness everywhere, and fear of what the future may hold.
- ▣ Sometimes, God does something that stops all our chatter.

Three and half years is code for the period of the church's witness (11:2f, 6; 12:6f, 14; 13:5; cf. Dan.7:25; 12:7). God keeps us through the rage of idol worship, hears our prayers and enables us to bear witness to his truth.

Grace time

God says two things—'Go and see Ahab', and, 'It's time for rain'.

- ▣ God has business with Ahab—to call him to repent.
- ▣ God will send the rain—regardless; not because the people repent. This is a work of grace. The point of the drought is not punishment but them knowing that God gives.
- ▣ Elijah can move forward with this word of God ringing in his ears! Something is going to happen to re-establish God in the thinking of the nation.

Elijah returns to Israel and arranges this meeting through his 'chief of staff', Obadiah.

Varieties of service

Obadiah is not an Elijah, but he fears God and is risking his life protecting and feeding prophets of the Lord—his boss' victims! His way of service is vastly different to Elijah's.

- ▣ He must serve his king with honour, attend to extracurricular activities with cunning, and fear God with integrity.
- ▣ We are reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer 'serving' the Third Reich as a secret agent.
- ▣ There are speaking and serving roles, both to be done with God's help (1 Pet. 5).

Obadiah knows Ahab is eager to get Elijah—negotiating with world leaders to locate him.

- ▣ Does the King want to kill him? Or does he want his prayers for rain?
- ▣ Obadiah says three times that he fears for his life. He fears the Spirit's agenda will change and he will be blamed for a 'no-show'. But the Spirit's course is set.
- ▣ He is an eminently practical and realistic man, not a scared one.

Israel needs to choose God

The King, the people and the priests are summoned. It's hard to argue with a man who has 'controlled' the weather for over three years!

- ❑ Elijah knows he has not caused Israel's disaster—even though he prayed for the rain to stop.
- ❑ Ahab is the cause of Israel's troubles. It is he who has led Israel in breaking their covenant with God and established a covenant with 'the Baals'.
- ❑ Christians must act well and seek the welfare of their countries. If we do this we cannot accept blame for our confession. The book of Acts demonstrates that Christians did not cause the problems they are accused of.
- ❑ Those who break God's covenant cause the world to 'mourn and wither' (Isa. 24:4-5).
- ❑ Elijah knows Mount Carmel will be a good spot for a show-down. It is established as a place for worship of Baal. It has not been used for worshipping the Lord for a long time. It provides a 'home crowd' advantage for Baal worshippers.

The choice

The King, the people and the priests are asked to choose their God (repeating Josh. 24:15).

- ❑ Elijah doesn't want to stage a coup. This is a matter of what the king trusts.
- ❑ The contest is uneven: 1 prophet to 450 priests—or 950 with the Asherah priests.
- ❑ Baal is the storm god. Can he light a fire? He hasn't been able to send rain for over three years.
- ❑ Devotees acknowledge Baal has human failings and needs. He can easily be shown to be false.
- ❑ Cf. Paul at Athens (Acts 14:15f; 17:29-30).
- ❑ A day of frantic action and many words yields nothing.

The restoration of true worship

- ❑ Elijah rebuilds a broken altar to the Lord at the time for evening sacrifice.
- ❑ It has 12 stones for 12 tribes—not the 10 who have separated.
- ❑ The true place of worship is where we can pray, and be forgiven (2 Chron. 7:12-15).
- ❑ Elijah wants Israel to know the God of their fathers is God, that he is God's servant, that all has happened by Yahweh's word, and that he that he has turned their hearts back—that is, everything is of God.
- ❑ A bull is the animal offered for the whole nation.
- ❑ Elijah is not a priest and cannot light the fire.
- ❑ God sends fire, showing he is the true God of storms—and that he accepts their worship. What happened at the inauguration of the tabernacle, and of the temple is repeated.
- ❑ The fire consumes the sacrifice, not the people!
- ❑ All of this calls for Calvary where God's fire falls on his Son and opens the way for us to be forgiven, and for our prayers to be heard.
- ❑ Israel freely chooses God. God knows those who are true in this confession.
- ❑ To oppose true worship is a capital offence (Deut. 13:6-11), so Elijah calls on the people to do what they should have done earlier. In a theocracy, idolatry is treason.

Providence is assured.

- ❑ Elijah already knows there will be rain but prays for God to fulfill his word.

- ▣ We are to pray for God's name to be hallowed and his kingdom to come and his will to be done. This honouring and preferring of God is the context for asking for food, forgiveness and God's leadership in righteousness.

God's name is proclaimed.

We are not told why Elijah runs in front of Ahab's chariot but he is aided by the Spirit so we may suppose that he wanted to announce the victory rather than Ahab.