

Elijah and the Contest

Elijah was a prophet of action not diction

He was a prophet who did things in a nation that couldn't do anything

He was a prophet of power in a nation that was paralyzed by idolatry.

His life was a statement that he worshiped God with his whole being. He was not polished. HE was manly and pictured like John the Baptist of the New Testament.

He was everything that King Ahab was not. Ahab was a man that had been emasculated by a wife that dominated him and his kingdom. He appears to have been a whiny, sniffling weak man.

Elijah burst on the scene and declared that there would be no rain and then he left. He was a man of few words. He had confronted Ahab once and now it was time to confront him again. In one sentence he shut the water off for three and a half years.

¹ Later on, in the third year of the drought, the LORD said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!"² So Elijah went to appear before Ahab.

Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria.

Point to remember: The Word does the work in our lives and ministries

You have to let it work

(like a seed in the ground that is planted and then does the work)

His word had been working for three years. Israel had searched for water, Elijah and everything but God.

New Character in Elijah's story, Obadiah: The man who had too many masters

³ So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Obadiah was a devoted follower of the LORD. ⁴ Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.) ⁵ Ahab said to Obadiah, "We must check every spring and valley in the land to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules."⁶ So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

⁷ As Obadiah was walking along, he suddenly saw Elijah coming toward him. Obadiah recognized him at once and bowed low to the ground before him. "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" he asked.

⁸ "Yes, it is," Elijah replied. "Now go and tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

Obadiah is an interesting person. He didn't know for sure who to serve. The King had Obadiah looking for water while Elijah was out of the country for three years. He feared the Lord but he worked for the backsliding evil King and he was scared of him as well.

Did you ever notice that Elijah was always jumping out of the bushes at somebody? He shows up in Ahab's throne room. Later on he shows up in Naboth's vineyard. (21:17-21) Now he shows up in front of Obadiah. He had tried to help the servants of God but he is working for the King that was killing the servants of God.

You would be scared too. (description of Elijah) When you bump into a man like Elijah you want to think up something good to say.

Elijah wasn't stupid or naïve or just a good kind man. He wasn't a clergyman, or a religious person, or a politician or polite. He was just truthful.

⁹ "Oh, sir," Obadiah protested, "what harm have I done to you that you are sending me to my death at the hands of Ahab? ¹⁰ For I swear by the LORD your God that the king has searched every nation and kingdom on earth from end to end to find you. And each time he was told, 'Elijah isn't here,' King Ahab forced the king of that nation to swear to the truth of his claim. ¹¹ And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here.'" ¹² But as soon as I leave you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you away to who knows where. When Ahab comes and cannot find you, he will kill me. Yet I have been a true servant of the LORD all my life. ¹³ Has no one told you, my lord, about the time when Jezebel was trying to kill the LORD's prophets? I hid 100 of them in two caves and supplied them with food and water. ¹⁴ And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here.'" Sir, if I do that, Ahab will certainly kill me."

¹⁵ But Elijah said, "I swear by the LORD Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab this very day."

Point to Remember: The whole problem with Israel was they didn't know who to serve.

or who their Master was

You have to know who you serve!

Elijah knew who his Master was and when you know whom your Master is everything else comes into focus. IF you know who you serve you will know everything else you need to know.

Joshua 24:14-15: ¹⁴ "So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD."

They had backslidden in the 300 years since Joshua. They were serving the sex god of Astarte (prostitution) and the god of Baal who was the god of the earth. They frequented the temple of

the Lord God Jehovah but also worshipped at these other temples. They were ambivalent because they didn't know who their master was. Elijah was there for that reason. He was there to help Israel know who their master was?

16 So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. 17 When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"

18 "I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. 19 Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel."^a

20 So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. 21 Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.

Elijah was called to correct the thinking of a wayward people. Doesn't that sound familiar? Does it bother you that churches and the people in the church seem to be so desensitized to this world and the culture that we live in?

Elijah is calling them out and he says, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions." He is saying if serving Baal is the thing to do then do it with all your might. If serving Astarte is what you want to do then do it with all your might but quit going back and forth between the two. Make up your mind who God is.

Ahab was a coward and had noodles for a spine. He married a woman that was not an Israelite and he made a covenant with the gods of her country that was forbidden by God. She dominated him and took over, which meant she brought her gods with her and she kept 850 false prophets on her payroll.

Listen again to what Ahab says, "***16 So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. 17 When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"***

Ahab is determined to make Elijah the enemy. The enemy of our souls and ministry wants nothing more than for us to believe that we are the troublemakers. As a pastor preach or teach or take a stand against the killing of unborn babies in our society and you will have to defend yourself. You take a stand in defense of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman and you will have to defend yourself.

We will never be very effective in our ministries or lives if we allow ourselves to always be on the run on in a defensive position. You can't confront evil without getting into trouble. Where does evil come from? It comes from the Devil.

¹⁸ “I have made no trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.

Apparently Elijah had never known about the separation of church and state. He had no trouble telling the King what to do. He said, get all your false prophets to Mt. Carmel and get all of Israel there as well. We are going to see who God is.

He was not inviting them to a symposium on “who God is”. He was not inviting them to a theological society of higher learning. If we were doing this today we would probably invite a whole lot of people nobody could understand to talk about something people don’t care about.

Elijah is more Clint Eastwood the Joel Osteen. More into confrontation than happy talk.

This was not a seminar. A lot of people look for entertainment that’s dramatic instead of going to church because the Bible has been so emasculated there’s not much left to hand people. If you read it for yourself you will find that there is a contest between good and evil. There is a real fight that we are in.

Elijah chose the place and dictated the terms. By the way did you notice that he didn’t spell out the terms until they all got there? The prophets of Baal may not have come if they had known the rules.

²² Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. ²³ Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!” And all the people agreed.

You do understand that this put them at a real disadvantage for two reasons. First of all Baal wasn’t a god and secondly Elijah has the gift of fire! Not all prophets had that gift. Elijah’s view of the end of this contest was that whoever’s god answered by fire would be the winner and the whole nation would turn and serve just one God.

He offered the terms and “the people liked it.” They had a seat on the 50 yard line. Elijah was convinced that he was the only one left serving God. While he wasn’t the only one serving God he was the only one there.

This was going to be the last meeting for somebody.

The destiny of the nation was at stake.

More and more I run into people that have a “many gods” mentality. We live a culture that has embraced the theory that all roads lead to heaven. I hear people sometimes say, “What difference does it make who God is?”

It makes all the difference in the world. We have been blessed as a nation. While we are certainly not a Christian nation anymore we are still a long way from being a nation that totally worships false gods. We have no idea what it would be like to live in a nation that embraces witchcraft or what it is like to have our lives controlled by a witch doctor, or live in a nation where you can't cut down a tree or kill a cow or a rat and they are eating your grain up. Believe me it makes a difference. I thank God for Christianity.

What difference does it make? How about going out back behind the temple of Astarte and seeing the corpses of hundreds of dead babies because the people worshipping didn't want families they just wanted sex and ask those little dead babies if it makes a difference who you believe in or who God is?

My prayer is that God will raise up some men and women that can look at our nation and say bluntly if sex is god then worship sex but if Jesus is God then worship Him and quit going back and forth. If entertainment is god. . . , If sports is god. . . We have in our nation the influence of Baal and Astarte as much as they did. It mattered who answered by fire!

(the prayer to no god) The stakes were incredibly high for them and they are high for us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is more than filling a seat or a pew in a church! It is a matter of life and death and that is what Elijah was standing up for.

²⁵ *Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood."*

²⁶ *So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" **But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.***

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

²⁸ *So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. ²⁹ They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, **but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.***

Elijah is not your normal minister! He was the original prophet of trash talking. A lie is a lie and the fact that 850 Prophets believed it doesn't make it the truth. They had been praying for 3 hours. He began grinding on them a little. (ver.27)

How many of you know this wasn't very Christian of him? Well he wasn't a Christian so it didn't matter. You and I are so this is not a good model for us. They were bleeding, they were passing out and Elijah seemed to be enjoying the whole thing. Put it in context: these are the people that had killed the prophets of God. They had killed his friends.

At about 3 o'clock, Elijah says that's enough. 3 is the hour of evening prayers and sacrifice according to Leviticus and when Jesus gave up the ghost 900 years later.

Elijah starts rebuilding the altar of God. This is a big deal. It is symbolic don't you think? He says, Come to me. The role of the prophet is to call people back to God from their false ways.

³⁰ Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down. ³¹ He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, ³² and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the LORD. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. ³³ He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood."

³⁴ After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said, ³⁵ and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

Remember this is a time when water was precious but he is laying everything on the line but this is his time and this is God's time. He was standing in front of a generation that had never seen the power of God. He didn't need to rebuke them. They had grown up for generations watching their parents and grandparents go through the motions in the temple and there was no power or life in the rituals. They watched them go to the temples of Baal and Astarte in direct contradiction of God's commands and word. Does any of this sound familiar? Elijah didn't busy himself with condemnation he just prepared to demonstrate the power of God. He was dealing with people that had never seen a miracle.

And then he prayed. The false prophet had prayed about six hours, he prayed about sixty seconds!

³⁶ At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,^e prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. ³⁷ O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."

He is calling them back to the God of their fathers. He prayed. . .and immediately. . .

³⁸ Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"

The people started worshipping and they couldn't quit. "The Lord He is God!" They were under conviction for generations of wayward living and ignoring the word of God. They realized they were the people of God gone astray. While the people were praising. . .

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded, “Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don’t let a single one escape!” So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

Elijah is a symbol for those of us in this room that have been called by God to speak for Him.

It is not easy. It is gut wrenching to watch the people you lead be sucked into the culture until you don’t find much difference between them the people they live around and work with. We live and minister in a day not unlike Elijah’s day.

Can we go to Malachi for a moment?

“Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

I believe that Malachi is talking about John the Baptist and he was a type of Elijah.

² **“But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears?”** Can we stand and be prophetic in our pulpits? Can people stand it?

For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. ³ *He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so **that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD.*** ⁴ *Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.*

⁵ *“At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,”* says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

In Malachi 4

The LORD of Heaven’s Armies says, “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.

² *“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.*

⁵ *“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. ⁶ His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse*

God is not finished with the spirit of Elijah. John the Baptist was characterized by Jesus as being like John the Baptist. John came and challenged King and his wife. (Herod and Herodias) for their evil deeds. He proclaimed the word of the Lord and he lost his head because of it.

He called Israel back to word of God and to the Messiah. When Jesus was on the Mt. of Transfiguration and considering giving up it was Moses and Elijah that came and talked to him about his upcoming crucifixion.

This world needs some more Elijah's that will proclaim the word of God without fear.

We don't have to limp back and forth between one position or another. We need to be faithful. We need to keep looking for God and for the fire and the rain. Don't just keep looking in old water holes where the water used to be. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

⁴¹ Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go get something to eat and drink, for I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!" ⁴² So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.

⁴³ Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the sea." The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything."

Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. ⁴⁴ Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a man's hand rising from the sea."

Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!'" ⁴⁵ And soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel. ⁴⁶ Then the LORD gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt^[1] and ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.