

# Fire from Heaven1 Kings 18:19-40

The story of Elijah is full of incredible moments. We have seen wonderful provision through ravens, multiplication through grain jars and oil canisters, and the resurrection of a dead boy to life. As we read through the Old Testament, this is a unique moment - the power of God is being displayed through the prophet of God like never before. Yet at the same time we know that the vast majority of God's people have rejected Him - worshipping other gods. There is a wicked Queen Jezebel - slaughtering the prophets of God. It is at this time God moves in power.

When Jesus walked the Earth, there was again great darkness, oppression and fear - and Jesus worked many great miracles, seeing the dead raised to life, wonderful provision with God's power evident - to the point where people called Jesus 'Elijah'. This is repeated throughout Church History - in times and places of great evil and darkness, our God will work miracles. Even today, in countries of darkest oppression, we are hearing wonderful stories of God moving. God loves people too much to leave them to Jezebel.

## A Thirsting Crowd (verses 19-20)

This is an incredible scene. This is a mass gathering for a desperate, thirsty crowd. Ahab is desperate, and so does what Elijah has instructed. Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered, following three years of no rain - they were desperate for break though in their circumstances. Ahab's crowd does not impress God. Having thousands gathering at his command does not make him a good leader. There is a huge gathering, but they are not there for God. Their heart is not expecting to repent and to turn back to God. Instead they are gathering for rain, believing Elijah has the solution - a prosperity gospel seeking the blessing of rain, not the Living God.

What is our purpose as a church? A 'prosperity gospel' might gather a crowd, and speak into people's circumstances but it doesn't address the greater need of their soul. The primary purpose for the church is not to quench the thirst of the parched tongue, but instead to invite people to quench their parched souls with water from Jesus. There are souls that are desperately in need of a drink, and it is more than rain that is required (**Read John 4:10&14 and Isaiah 55:1**).

**Q. Where are we most tempted to seek 'rain', and expect relief from the church rather than quenching souls?**

## The Agony of Ambivalence (verse 21)

Elijah addresses the vast crowd and calls them to a point of decision - which is it going to be, YHWH or Baal? The people of Israel are indecisive, half-hearted and non-committed - limping between two contradicting worldviews. With a foot in both camps, there is no way to stand for either. Elijah calls them out, to decide and live full out. Israel didn't really know what they believed in, and so accepted anything. Today people still don't really know, and so hold on to 'well wishes' - the hope of something better. I'll say a prayer when things are tough. I'll hold on to the hope of heaven and vague spirituality, to see my loved ones again. However, I'm not going to get too religious, go to church or 'follow Jesus'.

Elijah is brave, in a dangerous position, to call them out - but they remain silent. The crowd did not say a word. They are hoping for something better, but they are caught between God and the views of the world. The powerful prophet is sharing, convicting hearts - a challenge to the people to make a stand and declare what the stand for. Yet they remain silent, sitting on the fence.

**Q. How can we see this ambivalence and indecisiveness towards Christian beliefs in the world today?**

**Q. How can we be tempted to remain silent when God works to convict our hearts?**

## Idols are Idle (verses 22-29)

Elijah lays down a challenge to the prophets of Baal and Asherah. This is a comical yet devastating scene - as the people call upon Baal, throwing everything they can to summon him. After a drought, mal-nourished and thirsty, they call upon a god who did not answer. Even when Elijah points this out, taunting their god, they react by yelling louder and even slashing themselves in a desperate act to convince their idol to act. However, their god remains idle and impotent.

We may not see the same gods today, yet society still has idols which are clamouring for our worship; the next promotion, the bigger house, the ideal relationship, the healthy body and perfect beauty. Pursuing and living for other things, and the praise of the world. We all have our idols, where we can be tempted to find our self-worth and identity - but these idols have no voice and cannot quench the thirst in our soul.

**Q. What are our biggest temptations to idols? How can they appear to provide self-worth and identity?**

**Q. How does worship of these idols lead us to working and striving with desperation, while they remain silent?**

## Fire from Heaven (verses 30-39)

God's plan doesn't go straight to the rain to end the drought, but instead to fire. Here we have the vindication of Elijah. Israel have forgotten their God, and are reminded in power - power that turns rocks to dust. They have been a fickle people, now fall down and worship God. Elijah couldn't turn a nation back to God - it required fire from heaven.

John the Baptist spoke of one who would baptise with fire and the Holy Spirit. Pentecost saw the Spirit come with tongues of fire. God has determined to move in an all-consuming fire into the hearts of men, women, children and communities. God is doing a work in us that people can't miss. Elijah waited three years, and the change came in an instant. We need the Holy Spirit, the fire of God to change hearts - to impact our lives, and the lives around us.

**Q. How can we be tempted to 'convince' and bring people to God? How do we make room for God to move?**

**Q. Where are you tempted to give up, seeing little hope? How can you seek God and His will in these times?**