

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 1 KINGS 18

1 KINGS 18:1-6 - THE SEARCH FOR GRASS

V. 1-2 - ELIJAH TOLD TO RETURN TO ISRAEL AND FACE AHAB

V. 3-4 — **OBADIAH** - WE DON'T KNOW ANY MORE ABOUT THIS RECORD THAN WHAT IS MENTIONED HERE BUT WE DO LEARN ABOUT OBADIAH, A MAN WHO "FEARED THE LORD GREATLY". A BRIEF BUT NOTABLE REMINDER THAT GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS PEOPLE, IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS AND CAN WORK IN WONDERFUL WAYS IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. OBADIAH "SUPERVISED THE PALACE" (NET) AND IS ABLE TO TAKE RESOURCES FROM A PLACE IN ISRAEL THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN LEAST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT AND GIVE TO THE REMNANT PROPHETS TO SURVIVE.

1 KINGS 18:7-16 - ELIJAH MEETS OBADIAH

OBADIAH MEETS ELIJAH WHILE SEARCHING FOR GRASS FOR THE KING'S CATTLE. ELIJAH WANTS OBADIAH TO INFORM AHAB ABOUT ELIJAH'S RETURN AND DESIRE TO MEET THE KING. OBADIAH IS HESITANT AND SHREWD - HE DOES NOT WANT TO TELL AHAB THAT HE HAS SEEN ELIJAH ONLY FOR ELIJAH TO GO BACK INTO HIDING, FOR THEN OBADIAH'S LIFE WILL BE AT STAKE. OBADIAH APPEALS TO ELIJAH IN LIGHT OF HIS OWN FIDELITY TO THE LORD DURING THE DROUGHT. ELIJAH PROMISES TO MEET AHAB.

1 KINGS 18:17-20 - ELIJAH MEETS AHAB

THE PROPHET AND THE KING MEET AGAIN AFTER YEARS OF DROUGHT. WE LEARNED FROM OBADIAH THAT AHAB HAD BEEN SEARCHING FOR ELIJAH (V. 10) AND NOW ELIJAH RETURNS. ELIJAH CONFRONTS AHAB (THE REAL "TROUBLER OF ISRAEL" V. 18) AND TELLS HIM TO GATHER THE LEADING PROPHETS OF BAAL AND ASHERAH, ALONG WITH THE NATION ITSELF.

V. 19 - **MOUNT CARMEL** - THE LOCATION OF THIS CHALLENGE IS SIGNIFICANT. MOUNT CARMEL IS MENTIONED IN EXTRA-BIBLICAL SOURCES AS A CENTER OF BAAL WORSHIP.

"IF CARMEL WAS BAAL'S TURF (NOTE YAHWEH'S ALTAR THERE HAD BEEN PULLED DOWN (18:30), THEN HE HAD WHAT IN CONTEMPORARY ATHLETICS WE CALL 'HOME COURT ADVANTAGE'. TEAMS PLAYING AT "HOME" ENJOY THOROUGH FAMILIARITY WITH THE COURT OR FIELD AND CAN COUNT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST OF THEIR PARTISAN FANS. IF YAHWEH WHIPS BAAL ON THE LATTER'S OWN TURF, IT WILL ONLY HIGHLIGHT THE SUPREMACY OF YAHWEH AND IMPOTENCE OF BAAL." (DALE RALPH DAVIS, "FOCUS ON THE BIBLE: 1 KINGS", PG 235)

1 KINGS 18:21-24 - A CHALLENGE PROPOSED

V. 21 - "HOW LONG WILL YOU HESITATE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? IF THE LORD (YAHWEH) IS GOD, FOLLOW HIM; BUT IF BAAL, FOLLOW HIM. - POWERFUL AND CHALLENGING QUESTION.

"THIS IS NO MERE ACADEMIC QUESTION...ELIJAH WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO ATTEND A 'GOD CONTEST' SIMPLY SO THAT YOU CAN CONCLUDE, 'WELL, NOW WE KNOW THAT YAHWEH IS THE REAL GOD. WHAT MOVIE DO YOU WANT TO SEE?' ELIJAH, THE BIBLE,

YAHWEH HIMSELF, WILL NOT ALLOW YOU THE COMFORT OF SUCH DETACHMENT. 'IF YAHWEH IS GOD, FOLLOW HIM.' - DALE RALPH DAVIS (FOCUS ON THE BIBLE: 1 KINGS, PAGE 233)

V. 23-24 - CHALLENGE: WHICH GOD WILL SEND FIRE TO A PREPARED ALTAR AND SACRIFICE?

V. 24 - "THAT IS A GOOD IDEA" - REMEMBER THAT, AS WE OBSERVED IN 1 KINGS 17, THE DROUGHT WAS NOT JUST A CONSEQUENCE OF AHAB'S SIN - IT WAS THE LORD CHALLENGING BAAL. BAAL WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FERTILITY OF THE LAND AND RAIN WAS HIS TO CONTROL. THE LACK OF RAIN MEANT LACK OF BAAL. THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, THEMSELVES BEING CHALLENGED TO CHOOSE WHICH GOD TO WORSHIP AND SERVE WOULD HAVE HAD A DIFFICULT LAST THREE YEARS. AS A RESULT, THE PEOPLE WELCOME SUCH A "DUEL" BETWEEN THE PROPHETS, AND IN FACT THE LORD AND BAAL. THIS ATTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE MUST HAVE PUT PRESSURE ON THE PROPHETS OF BAAL TO ACCEPT. IT'S HARD TO UNDERSTAND ANOTHER REASON WHY THEY WOULD HAVE - THEY HAVE THE POWER AND AUTHORITY AS THEY ARE THE GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED RELIGIOUS ORDER. BUT THE PEOPLE ARE WATCHING AND WAITING.

FOR ELIJAH, HE HAS JUST EXPERIENCED THE PROVISION & FAITHFULNESS OF GOD FOR 3 YEARS (FED BY RAVENS AND WIDOW, ETC). HE IS NOW IN A POSITION WHERE HE CAN TRUST GOD IN THE BIG BECAUSE HE HAS SEEN HIS FAITHFULNESS IN THE "SMALL" (CP. DAVID FACING GOLIATH AFTER DEFEATING THE LION & BEAR).

1 KINGS 18:25-29 - THE PROPHETS OF BAAL GO FIRST

IT IS EASY TO LAUGH AT THE SEEMING FOOLISHNESS OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL. THEIR SHOUTING, LEAPING AND CUTTING LOOK ABSURD AND JUVENILE. BUT A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE TEXT ACTUALLY GIVES US SOME INSIGHT INTO THEIR BEHAVIOR. I FORMERLY LOOKED AT THEIR BEHAVIOR AS RANDOM AND DESPERATE, BUT IT APPEARS THAT THEIR BEHAVIOR WAS ACTUALLY MUCH MORE IN LINE WITH WHAT A STANDARD BAAL WORSHIP SERVICE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE.

V. 26 - "LEAPED" - NASB TRANSLATION NOTE "LITERALLY LIMPED" I.E. A TYPE OF CEREMONIAL DANCE

V. 28 - CUT THEMSELVES "ACCORDING TO THEIR CUSTOM" - THE CUTTING WAS NOT NECESSARILY AN ACT OF DESPERATION, BUT PART OF THEIR NORMAL ROUTINE

V. 29 - THEY "RAVED" UNTIL THE TIME OF THE OFFERING OF THE EVENING SACRIFICE - THE WORD TRANSLATED "RAVED" IS THE WORD FOR "PROPHET" OR "PROPHESY" (HEBREW: NAVA/NABA). WHEN WE THINK "RAVED" WE THINK ABOUT SOMEONE TALKING WILDLY. THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN WHAT IT SOUNDED LIKE, BUT THE SOUND WAS AN ECSTATIC AND PROPHETIC RAVING, NOT JUST LOUD SCREAMS.

SO RATHER THAN A RANDOM AND DESPERATE SCENE, WE SEE AN ATTEMPT AT A SPIRITUAL AND TRADITIONAL CONJURING OF A RESPONSE FROM BAAL. THEY WERE ULTIMATELY DESPERATE, BUT THEIR ACTIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSISTENT WITH THEIR CUSTOM AND MANNER, TELLING US THAT THEY REALLY THOUGHT SOMETHING MIGHT HAPPEN.

BUT BAAL IS NO GOD AT ALL. AND DEAD STONE AND HARDENED WOOD HAVE NO POWER. THEIR RITUALS, THOUGH OUTWARDLY NOTICEABLE, WERE EMPTY RITUALS BECAUSE THE ONE THEY PRAYED TO IS AN IDOL. AND YET THEY DID THEIR RELIGIOUS ACTS IN VAIN, FOR HOURS.

MEANWHILE, ELIJAH IS CERTAINLY MOCKING THEM WITH HIS ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THEM TO "CALL OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE" BECAUSE MAYBE BAAL IS "OCCUPIED", "ON A JOURNEY", "ASLEEP" OR "GONE ASIDE" WHICH IMPLIED BAAL MIGHT BE "RELIEVING HIMSELF" (ESV, NLT).

1 KINGS 18:30-35 - ELIJAH PREPARES HIS ALTAR

V. 34-35 - THE WATER IS APPLIED SO THAT NO ONE WOULD ASSUME OR ALLEGE THAT ELIJAH HAD DONE A "TRICK" TO LIGHT A FIRE. ELIJAH IS PUTTING HIMSELF IN A POSITION WHERE HE WILL BE EXPOSED (AND LIKELY KILLED) UNLESS THE LORD SHOWS UP.

1 KINGS 18:36-40 - ELIJAH'S PRAYER & GOD'S RESPONSE

V. 36-37, 39 - THE CORE OF ELIJAH'S REQUEST IS THAT GOD WOULD BE GLORIFIED AND THAT THE PEOPLE WATCHING WOULD KNOW THAT THE LORD (YAHWEH) WAS GOD. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE PEOPLE, LONGING FOR THIS PROPHETIC DUEL THEMSELVES (V. 24), EXCLAIM - "THE LORD, HE IS GOD; THE LORD, HE IS GOD" (V. 39). NOTE ELIJAH NEEDS NO RELIGIOUS FERVOR OR ECSTATIC RITUALS, HE SIMPLY PRAYS TO THE LIVING GOD.

V. 38 - **THE FIRE OF THE LORD** - TO ENSURE NO ONE THOUGHT THIS WAS A RANDOM LIGHTNING STRIKE, THE FIRE NOT ONLY CONSUMES THE ALTAR AND EVAPORATES THE WATER, EVEN THE STONES ARE BURNED UP. A QUICK SEARCH OF THE INTERNET GAVE TEMPERATURES FOR ROCKS TO BURN AT OVER 2000 DEGREES.

V. 40 - NOW SUPPORTED BY THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL GATHERED AT MT. CARMEL, THE FALSE PROPHETS ARE ALL SEIZED AND EXECUTED.

1 KINGS 18:41-46 - RAIN IN ISRAEL. ELIJAH RUNS

AFTER A TIME OF PRAYER, A STORM CLOUD APPEARS ON THE HORIZON. ELIJAH INFORMS AHAB TO PREPARE HIMSELF FOR THE RAIN AND AMAZINGLY ARRIVES ON FOOT BEFORE THE KING AT THE SAME DESTINATION AHAB TRAVELS TO VIA CHARIOT. RAIN RETURNS TO ISRAEL, BUT DOES THE HEART OF IT'S KING RETURN TO THE LORD? NO. AND HIS EVIL QUEEN, JEZEBEL WILL NOT BE HAPPY WHEN SHE HEARS HER PRIVATE ROYAL CULT OF PROPHETS HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSED AND EXECUTED. ELIJAH HAS SECURED VICTORY IN CHAPTER 18, BUT WILL FACE A NEW CHALLENGE IN CHAPTER 19.

THERE IS AN ADDITIONAL LESSON, RELEVANT TO US, TO GLEAN FROM THIS STORY. IT IS GOOD FOR US TO EXAMINE HOW OUR LIVES ARE BEING LIVED. WHAT HAVE WE DETERMINED IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN IN OUR WORLD TODAY? WHILE IT MIGHT BE EASY (THOUGH PERHAPS UNKNOWN TO US) TO KEEP OURSELVES IN A POSITION WHERE WE DO NOT NEED GOD, THIS IS NOT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN. CHRISTIANITY IS A LIFE LIVED THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE CAN BE HUSBANDS, WIVES, FATHERS, MOTHERS, GOOD AND NICE PEOPLE WHO CAN HAVE AN OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF "GOOD" AND "SPIRITUAL" AND "RELIGIOUS" - BUT THAT IS MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE PROPHETS OF BAAL AND THEIR WORSHIP THAN IT IS OF ELIJAH'S. ELIJAH'S SHOWS US WHAT LIFE IS LIKE WHEN WE STAND FOR THE LORD.

IT CAN BE RISKY TO CROSS OVER THAT LINE, STEP OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE AND OUR "SAFE" PLACE - BUT THE LORD WORKS WHEN WE DO. THE LORD DID NOT ABANDON HIS MAN, ELIJAH, WHEN ELIJAH TOOK A STAND FOR THE LORD, AND HE WILL NOT ABANDON US. BUT WE WILL NEVER SEE AND KNOW AND FEEL AND LIVE IN THE WORK AND POWER OF GOD IF WE DO NOT PUT OURSELVES IN A POSITION WHERE WE ACTUALLY NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ARE NO LONGER DEPENDANT ON OUR OWN ABILITIES AND STRENGTH. OUR GOD IS THE LIVING GOD. THE EVERLASTING GOD. WHO DOES NOT GROW WEARY OR TIRED OR TAKE A DAY OFF. HE IS FILLED WITH MIGHT AND WISDOM AND LOVE. AS WE STAND FOR HIM IN THIS GENERATION, HE WILL SHOW HIMSELF STRONG. BUT WE CANNOT KEEP OURSELVES IN THE SAFE AND COMFORTABLE PLACE WHERE WE DON'T REALLY NEED HIM TO SHOW UP. FOR AS LONG AS WE REMAIN THERE, HE WILL NOT BE SHOWN AS THE TRUE AND REAL AND ONLY GOD TO THE CROWD OF PEOPLE AROUND US, THE ONES WHO NEED TO KNOW HIM MOST OF ALL.