

Portraits of a Prophet 5

10.1.23

1 Kings 18:20-29

²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.

²² Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. ²³ Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who answers with fire, he is God."

All the people answered, "That's fine."

²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire."

²⁶ So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷ At noon Elijah mocked them. He said, "Shout loudly, for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up!" ²⁸ They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. ²⁹ All afternoon they kept on raving until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention.

1. Time for Confrontation

A. Elijah's faith was established upon a direct and clear word from God. 1 Kings 18

1. This is important.
2. Biblical, Christian faith must be established upon the revelation of Jesus.
3. The Book of James says, "Elijah was just a man yet he prayed, and it didn't rain for 3 ½ years."
 - a. The effectiveness of this prayer depended upon the clear Word of God.
 - b. Elijah prayed it wouldn't rain because God told him it wouldn't.
 - c. The breaking of the drought, through prayer, was in response to a clear Word from God.
4. Faith declares that we can do anything and everything God has told us to do.

B. Faith most often leads to confrontation.

1. In this passage, Elijah responds obediently to God's Word.
2. But BEFORE it was going to rain, there was conflict.
3. God was not going to deliver the land without a demonstration of His power.
4. It was time that the people decided who their God would be.
 - a. Faith requires us to declare who we are aligning with.
 - b. And the people were playing both sides.

2. Wavering between two opinions.

²¹ Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.

A. The people refused to fully attach themselves to one of the Gods.

1. They were caught between two opinions.

2. "Hebrew, Hobble on two crutches."

B. This was bigger than Elijah versus Ahab.

1. It wasn't even a contest between the God of Israel and Baal.

2. This encounter answers the question, "Is Elijah the true prophet of the true God?"

3. And if he was, then why were the people worshipping the baals?

a. Ahab didn't believe that Elijah had stopped the rain.

b. He believed that Elijah had offended Baal and Baal was withholding the rain.

c. Remember, Baal was considered the source of fertility and life.

C. The people refused to commit.

1. They wouldn't answer Elijah.

2. They didn't want to offend Baal, just in case.

3. This reveals this truth: **To be yoked with the world is to treat God as a crutch.**

a. Karl Marx said "Religion is the opium of the people."

b. And, in a sense, he was right.

c. When people add religion to everything else, then it is a crutch.

d. When we are caught between two opinions, we are leaning on whatever feels good at the moment.

4. **It is really easy for God to become just another crutch that we add to our life, just in case.**

a. But this, friends, is not the saving kind of faith that Scripture calls us to.

b. **Elijah is setting the stage for Israel to see how truly impotent and futile worshipping any other god is.**

3. You cannot awaken what is dead.ⁱ

1 Kings 18:26-29 (CSB)

²⁶ So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷ At noon Elijah mocked them. He said, "Shout loudly, for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up!" ²⁸ They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. ²⁹ All afternoon they kept on **raving** until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention.

A. Elijah mocks Baal and his prophets.

1. The Baal myths were well-known in that time.
2. The stories, legends, and worship of Baal were written and widely known.
3. Elijah know these stories and uses them to mock him and compare Baal to the Lord.

B. First, can Baal hear the cries of the prophets?

1. The joke is that Baal was too busy thinking and deciding what to do and couldn't respond.
2. This, compared to the God of Israel, who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always present.
3. When a man or woman of God calls upon the name of the Lord, God hears and understands and responds.

4. Yet, the people chose a God who was incapable of intervening in the daily activities of the people.

C. Second, maybe Baal is “relieving” himself.

1. The English softens the Hebrew idiom.

2. Baal was a God with physical urges and needs; maybe he hadn't yet responded because he was relieving himself alongside the road.

3. This, compared to the God who created all urges and functions, is not limited by the physical limitations of humanity.

4. Can you imagine worshipping a god who cannot answer your prayers right now because he is relieving himself?

a. Yet, how often do we place our trust in people who, themselves, are not god and are limited by flesh and sinful natures?

b. Any worship that is not focused upon God will disappoint and leave you looking for answers.

D. Third, maybe Baal is on a journey.

1. Because he's on a journey he can't give you the attention your matter deserves.

2. Yet, too often we treat God as a God of limits who must prioritize His resources and time and power so that they do not run dry!

3. Yet, He is a God of endless supply, of endless energy, and endless resources.

E. Lastly, maybe Baal is asleep.

1. This is in contrast to the God who never sleeps nor slumbers.

2. Why would anyone choose a god like Baal?

3. You cannot awaken what is dead, no matter how hard you try!

4. Desperately seeking god's attention.

A. The prophets of Baal show increasing desperation.

1. They danced, shouted, cut themselves, and raved.
2. And yet their god never answered.

B. It was the practice of Baal worship that the priests would go to great extremes to get Baal's attention.

1. This includes two elements that are part of Godly worship and two that were forbidden.

2. First, there is nothing wrong with dancing and shouting in worship.

a. But the reason someone may dance or shout is not to get God's attention but to express worship with the full body.

b. **We are emotional beings who were designed to worship with all of our body, mind, and soul.**

c. Therefore, we may sometimes shout or dance as a form of holistic worship.

d. However, a shout does not get God's attention any more than silence.

3. Two elements that were forbidden were cutting and "frantic" prophesying.

a. The CSB says "they kept on raving".

1. Another way to translate this is "frantic prophesying".

2. All sorts of things could be happening here:

a. People could be using as many words as possible to the right "formula" that god would hear.

b. They could have been doing a false-speaking in tongues, since prophesying in the OT has some similarities.

c. They were certainly running around going crazy, reflecting more of a drug scene than a worship service.

b. The key here is that no matter what they did, their god would not respond because their god was not alive.

1. We do not have to approach God like this because our God is alive, He does hear, He does respond.

2. A person who runs and shouts is no more spiritual than a person who is quiet.

4. They raved, and they cut themselves.

a. It was believed in that day that to get Baal's attention, they might have to inflict wounds and shed their own blood for god to see how serious they were.

b. Therefore, cutting with swords, daggers, and other means was a part of Baal worship.

c. This is in contrast to the God of Israel, who would send His own Son to shed His blood, to have His side pierced, and His hands nailed.

d. I cannot help but sense that there are some in this room who are presently cutting themselves.

1. You cut to escape.

2. You cut to feel.

3. You cut because you believe you deserve to be punished or know pain.

e. This morning, if that is you, I want to encourage you in a few ways in the Lord.

1. First, talk to somebody.

2. Second, a Christian counselor can be so important in your healing and recovery.

3. Third, recognize that there is a spiritual element to cutting:

a. It doesn't mean you are demon possessed.

b. But the same forces that encouraged these prophets to cut themselves to get a gods attention is still working today.

4. Before we move on, can we pray that if there are any people here today who are struggling with cutting will find immediate healing and deliverance?

5. The God who answers with fire, he is God.

A. I'm dealing with this out of order, because this is where the main emphasis is.

1. The original challenge: Bring the sacrifice, cut it in pieces, and prepare. But don't light it.

2. All day has passed, and Baal has not responded.

a. The sacrifice has been made.

b. The blood is growing cold.

c. The prophets are getting tired, and yet Baal has not responded.

3. Vs. 29 All afternoon they kept on **raving** until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention.

B. Is it possible that many of us in this room are guilty of bringing sacrifices to altars that have no fire?

1. You have given your life, your money, your energy, your family to people, places, and systems that have no power to save?

2. You have begged, cried, and sacrificed to no avail!
3. You've (HAVE YOU) laid it all out on altars that cannot accept your worship.

C. I know what happens next in this story.

1. I know that Elijah rebuilds the Lord's altar and that God sends fire down and consumes it all.
2. But that isn't where my mind was going in preparing today's sermon.
3. As I prepared my heart and mind for this message, my mind went to **Acts 2:1-4** (CSB)

2 When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. 3 They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. 4 Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

- a. Elijah prepared an altar with a physical sacrifice, and God sent a physical fire as confirmation of His power and presence.
- b. In Acts 2, the believers prepared an altar with their lives as a sacrifice, and God sent the Holy Spirit to confirm His power and presence.

Apply: "You provide the fire, I'll provide the sacrifice." Tasha Cobb

A. The God who answers with fire, He is God.

1. Today is a great day to come boldly before the throne of God and say, "Here I am!"
2. Maybe you are coming to God in pieces.
3. Maybe you have tried other altars and gods, yet they have never satisfied.

B. What am I to do?

1. Stop using God as a crutch or safety net and fully commit.
2. Give yourself fully to God, and let Him light you on fire with His Presence.
3. Get ready to tear down what He says, tear down, and “put to death” what he tells you must go, and rebuild what needs rebuilt.
4. Then give God space and opportunity to move.

PRAYER

ⁱ **27–29.** Elijah’s taunt is that Baal was acting in a merely human manner. He uses terms known to the people from the Ugaritic Baal myths. Was the god musing on the action to take (*deep in thought*)? Had he gone aside to answer the call of nature (so Targum; NEB ‘engaged’; NIV, after LXX, *busy*) or had he left on a journey with Phoenician merchants? Was Baal asleep as Yahweh was not (Ps. 121:3–4)? The practice of self-inflicted wounds to arouse a deity’s pity or response is attested in Ugarit when men ‘bathed in their own blood like an ecstatic prophet’. In mourning this was forbidden to the Hebrews (Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1). Baal’s priests acted like ecstatic prophets (v. 29, NIV, *frantic prophesying*; better RSV ‘ranted and raved’). This rare form of the verb (Heb. *hitnabbē’*) is used of mad actions (cf. 2 Kgs 9:11; Jer. 29:26). The fact that there is no response indicates Baal’s impotence (Jer. 10:5).ⁱ Wiseman, Donald J. 1993. *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 9. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.