

**Nov. 8, 2009 1 Kings 18:1-19 “Worldviews Collide” by Richard Boatman**

<sup>1</sup> 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!” <sup>2</sup> So Elijah went to appear before Ahab...<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> “Yes, it is,” Elijah replied. “Now go and tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”...<sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, “So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?” <sup>18</sup> “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. <sup>19</sup> 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.”

The pagan worshiper claimed that Baal—the god of the storm—sent rain. Ahab’s evil queen Jezebel had slain many of God’s prophets (verse 13) perhaps in an attempt to garner Baal’s favor so rain would be sent to the drought stricken land. So think about the significance of verse 1 when God says to Elijah, “Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that *I* will soon send rain!”

Did you get that? *I*—in other words, *not* Baal—will send rain. The God of Israel has forecasted rain. But is environmental drought the only difficulty Israel has? If it finally rains, will all their problems go away? If everyone could just have a better job or bigger house or the newest flat-screen TV or universal health care—would everything be fixed? Or was there also a spiritual drought going on? Yes. Being physically parched was to get their attention regarding the even more severe spiritual drought. Just how far had Israel drifted from its covenant moorings?

In a little over five decades, Israel had fallen from the pinnacle of its political and spiritual power under David. Now, through the wicked leadership of Ahab and Jezebel, the people of God were subverted by the worship of Baal and Asherah. These “gods” had their origins in Canaanite and Phoenician practice. They represented the god of the day and night, the sun—often represented by a bull—and the evening star, Venus. Combined, the emphases of Baal and Asherah were that of human and earthly fertility, personal power and military might. [Hmmm...unbridled sexuality, an emphasis on personal power and the strength to inflict our will on others...Nope, we can’t relate to that at all.] “Sacred” prostitution orgies and sometimes the sacrifice of children were a common part of

the Baal worship ritual. This entrenched and enticingly seductive system had lured Israel in its addictive grip. (Russell Dilday & Phillip Keller)

But God had not forgotten the people of God. Remember that the name Elijah means *Yahweh is God*. This fiery prophet, this rock of Israel announced by his very presence that there is a Redeemer in the land. Though the people had not repented, yet God was still going to move on their behalf. Does that sound familiar? Check out Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates [proves] his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Said differently, even when we don't see Jesus clearly, Jesus still clearly sees us and moves towards us in redemptive, restorative love.

My brother-in-law attended the Iowa State – Baylor homecoming game on October 17<sup>th</sup>. It was chilly...really chilly. I'm not sure at the time whether he was standing in a parking lot or sitting on the cold ground of the eastside hill, but he said he saw a sign in the distance that he thought said “Heated Toilets.” He was quite cold, so this sounded really good. But as he got closer to what he thought said “Heated Toilets,” he found it actually said, “Haunted Forrest.” I don't know how you get *Heated Toilets* out of *Haunted Forrest*, but don't we sometimes do the same with Jesus...we see him, yet we don't *fully* see him? “I see men as trees,” or “I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.”

Maybe that's sort of where Obadiah was in this mix. Obadiah was King Ahab's head administrator in charge of his palace and properties. It was a highly prestigious position. But, verse 3 tells us he was also “a devout believer in the Lord.” Verse 4 elaborates: “While Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves...and had supplied them with food and water.” So he is a believer in Yahweh who has even taken some level of risk. But when Elijah wants him to announce his presence to King Ahab, Obadiah nearly passes out. He's afraid of his boss Ahab and is concerned that Elijah will disappear again. In verse 12 he objects: “If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me.” Then in verse 14 his phobia is full throttle: “And now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ He will kill me!” Obadiah is caught between God's prophet, Elijah, and his wicked and hardened king, Ahab. He's between a rock and a hard place.

Author Phillip Keller describes it this way: *So in reality Obadiah found himself in a frightening bind. He was caught between...millstones of a spiritual monarch and an earthly king, both of whom he had tried to serve in fear, but neither of whom he*

*totally followed...Obadiah had tried to cover all the angles in his career. Now suddenly in the intense light and burning presence of the desert prophet, all his defenses were destroyed. He stood stripped, exposed and extremely vulnerable.*

Can you feel Obadiah's angst when God's prophet calls him to, as one NIV commentator asserts, "publically identify...with Elijah in contrast to his previous clandestine support of the prophets"? How do we relate to Obadiah? It seems to me he had the dubious distinction of standing in the middle of where worldviews were colliding.

Maybe that's how we relate, by fully taking in the collision of worldviews in our own time. Perhaps Ahab and Elijah represent timeless ideological heads that collide. And then as now, God calls us to make choices.

Do you ever feel like you agree with most if not all of a certain position, but the way that position is articulated kind of makes you uncomfortable? I have a friend with whom I agree on 95% of our theological conversations. But he has a prophetic personality that often borders on extreme. I agree with the message but how he serves it up makes me a little nervous at times.

It's like the Baptist and Methodist pastors who were standing by the side of the road pounding a sign into the ground. It read: "The End is Near! Turn Yourself Around *Now* Before it's Too Late!" As a car sped past them, the driver yelled, "Leave us alone you religious nuts!" Then from around the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash! The Methodist turns to the Baptist minister and asks, "Do you think the sign should just say 'Bridge Out'?"

Sometimes it's our method or style that turns folks off or that simply doesn't relate to them. But sometimes it *is* the message itself that provokes. I think this was the case when Elijah and Ahab met. Ahab said, "Here's the troublemaker for Israel." Elijah counters, "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped...Baal instead."

Ahab is saying, "You're going against the popular current—you're out of touch; you're rocking the boat, Elijah." But Elijah is saying, "You have broken a covenant with God, an agreement to live in obedience to his Word. This is why the land is experiencing devastation."

According to Gordon MacDonald, author of [Who Stole My Church?](#), we live in a postmodern world that "begins with the idea that there are no fixed, stand-alone

truths. Rather than this thing called truth coming from beyond ourselves—as Christians believe about God’s revelation—the postmodernist claims that truth is really only what *we* see or experience from our perspective. And when enough of us see or experience something...then whatever that is becomes truth for us.”

There are some striking similarities between this mindset and the Israel of Elijah’s day that was addicted to experiencing the sensual and recasting greed and power as forms of personal independence and self-actualization. Experience and pleasure and personal advantage had usurped the place of truth and obedience.

So what can we as believers learn from Elijah about relating to a culture that has forgotten its covenant, to a Church that has drifted from its spiritual moorings? Notice that Elijah did not begin by calling the people to repentance, which assumes the people’s consciences convict them of wrongs and push them to embrace the “right.” He did not begin with repentance but with a summons, a call to Carmel, an invitation to “come and see”...to experience God. Repentance would come but only after a level of relationship was shared.

Gordon MacDonald argues that 21<sup>st</sup> century people will not, for the most part, be “won” to Christ by arguing theological points but by experiencing God-inspired lifestyles as they are welcomed into relationship. Recently my pastor friend Randy Russom was on retreat at Pine Lake. One day while he and his wife Kathy were out walking, they met a young lady new to Eldora. They invited her to church. And when she came that first Sunday, then they invited her out to eat with them.

How is God speaking to us to invite others into relationship? The next time we have a fellowship meal, see if someone is sitting alone and join them. Like Randy, invite a new person to lunch or to your home. Start a Bible study with mostly newer folks. At the school lunch table, welcome an outsider. At the coffee shop, instead of staring at strangers, try smiling and saying, “Good morning.”

One of our book study members responded: “I’m not sure we’re very good at that here.” This person may or may not be right. But I suspect if our church is going to grow in this postmodern era, we—and all of us who worship Yahweh, the God of Israel—better *become* good at that.

Elijah summoned Israel to come and see the difference. It was not enough to tell them he had a “song” he could not “keep from singing” and try to “get them to believe it.” He was summoning them to *enter into* the “song”—to sing the song with him in a renewed relationship with the God of Israel.