

The Trouble With Elijah II

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Elijah was a man “born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). His name means *my God is Jehovah*. He was a member of Israel’s prophetic brotherhood whose communities (schools) appeared during the time of Samuel (I Samuel 10:5-10; 19:19-20). Under Samuel, God’s people threw off Philistine rule and successfully suppressed endemic Baal worship in Israel (I Samuel 7:3-4). Later, Jeroboam instituted calf worship in Israel driving priests and Levites into the rival kingdom of Judah (I Kings 12:28f; II Chronicles 11:13-14). Baal worship re-emerged under Ahab whose Queen, Jezebel, began a bloody purge of Jehovah’s prophets. Two communities of prophets survived, whom Obadiah sequestered in a cave (I Kings 18:13).

But, Jezebel’s agents failed to find and silence Elijah. Soon trouble began in Ahab’s kingdom in the person of Elijah. He appeared abruptly, declaring, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (I Kings 17:1). Then, he dropped out of sight before Queen Jezebel could have him arrested. Soon, God had all Israel’s attention as the denounced drought began to destroy crops and livestock. King Ahab desperately began an international man hunt for Elijah (I Kings 18:10). Ahab’s search for Elijah continued unsuccessfully for over three years (James 5:17).

At first, Elijah remained hidden by the little brook Cherith where the Lord had commanded ravens to feed him. Each morning and evening the ravens brought both “bread and flesh” which with Cherith aqua constituted his entire diet (I Kings 17:3-7). When the Cherith dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to live in a “safe house” near Sidon, Jezebel’s home, saying, “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (I Kings 17:9). Finally, the Lord directed Elijah to “Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth” (I Kings 18:1).

Ahab accused Elijah of troubling Israel (I Kings 18:17). Elijah shot back, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim” (I Kings 18:18). Elijah then demanded that Ahab summon all Israel to Mt. Carmel for a decisive contest between the Lord and Baal. Sadly, like many modern “evangelistic” meetings however compelling their message, Israel did not repent of their worship of Baal. Their hearts had not been turned back to God as Elijah had prayed (I Kings 18:37). To be sure, they cried, in terror, “The LORD, he is the God” (I Kings 18:39) but, at the end of the day, Jezebel was still in power threatening Elijah with death, as always.

Since trying to end Baal worship was as futile as “plowing the sea,” Elijah went to Sinai where Moses once talked with God. There he learned of seven thousand Israelite household heads who “have not bowed unto Baal” (I Kings 19:18) that needed a prophetic ministry. Moreover, Elijah also knew from Obadiah of two communities of prophets confined in a cave unable to render such service. So, when Elijah returned to Israel, he assumed leadership of these “sons of the prophets” relocated in Bethel and Jericho (II Kings 2:3,5). After Elisha succeeded Elijah, hooligans mocked him at the gates of Bethel, a center of calf worship. “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head” (II Kings 2:23). But, forty-two of these young toughs were mauled by two she bears after Elisha cursed them. Thus, any resumption of Jezebel’s bloody persecution of Elijah’s proteges was pre-empted. It was simply too much trouble.