

“Showdown”  
1 Kings 18:19-40  
(Preached at Trinity, July 25, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We have been following the account of the famine in Israel. The drought lasted for three and a half years. It would have been devastating. When Elijah met the widow at Zarephath two years earlier she was preparing her last meal. How many others perished from starvation? It was a great time of trouble.
2. As this chapter opens we find Ahab and Obadiah searching the land for some grass to feed the livestock. There was little likelihood of success. Elijah's brook dried up over two years before. It wasn't likely there would be other sources of water that would have provided moisture for grass. God's judgment was unrelenting.
3. But in the midst of this terrible judgment God demonstrated mercy.  
Habakkuk prayed:  
**Habakkuk 3:2 NAU** - "LORD, I have heard the report about You *and* I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy."
4. God was about to bring an end to the drought. He commands Elijah, "Go show yourself to Ahab."
  - A. By God's Providence the paths of Obadiah and Elijah crossed. God didn't need to use Obadiah to announce the arrival of Elijah. God could have caused the paths of Ahab and Elijah to intersect.
    - (1) Through Obadiah we witness a faithful, loyal, servant of God. A servant that knew danger and faced fear. God ordered the paths of Obadiah in order to provide opportunities of service, to test him and prove him. He does the same for us. Why does God order our lives in such precise ways?
    - (2) And it's through Obadiah that we learn of the greatness of Jezebel's wickedness in executing God's prophets.
    - (3) It also reveals how wicked Ahab was. If even this faithful servant feared Ahab who was safe from his fury? It was dangerous to live under the reign of Ahab.
  - B. God also didn't need to send Elijah. He could have sent rain without using Elijah as His mediator. But God had a purpose in using Elijah.  
There was an important truth to be taught. The whole issue here was the worship of Baal. Ahab and his wife Jezebel had declared Baal to be the god of the land. Baalism was the official religion of the land. Baal was the god of the storm. He was seen as the god who brought the rains to make the crops successful. If God just caused it to start raining Baal would have received the credit.
  - C. God was about to bring His people to repentance. Israel had abandoned God and forsaken covenant. They had come to trust in Baal to bring rain and sustain them. God will not allow rivals.

5. God did not abandon His people. God remembers covenant.
- A. Years before Solomon prayed:  
**1 Kings 8:35-36 NAU** - "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin when You afflict them, <sup>36</sup> then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land, which You have given Your people for an inheritance."
- B. Solomon's prayer, however, stipulated repentance – "and they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin."  
 Israel had not confessed their sin. They had not repented. Even after the three and a half year drought they were continuing to worship Baal.
6. This sets us up for the account before us. Before God sent the rain He was about to demonstrate the powerlessness of Baal and bring His people to repentance. We have here one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible. It is also one of the most amusing. It gives us a demonstration of Psalm 2  
**Psalm 2:1-4 NAU** - "Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup> "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" <sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them."
7. Elijah sets up a contest between himself and the 450 prophets of Baal. Ahab accepts the challenge and gathers all Israel to watch.  
**1 Kings 18:20 NAU** - "So Ahab sent a *message* among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel."
8. Then Elijah gave an ultimatum to Israel. How long would they continue the balancing act with one foot in the ring with God while they kept the other with Baal. The people remained uncommitted.  
**1 Kings 18:21 NAU** - "Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word."  
 They did not answer because they weren't convinced. They were doing what we call, "hedging their bets."

I. First, we have the showdown

A. Elijah sets up his grand stand

1. It was Elijah alone against the 450 prophets of Baal – **Verse 22**  
Elijah remains quiet regarding the 100 prophets being hidden by Obadiah
2. He orders the provisions for a sacrifice – an ox for the prophets of Baal and an ox for him. And he orders wood for the sacrifice but not fire.  
The sacrifice is prepared and then they are to call out to their god to send down fire.
3. This sets up the showdown. The prophets of Baal set the sacrifice in order and begin to cry out to Baal.  
**1 Kings 18:26 NAU** - "Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made."
4. It began early in the morning and at noon there was still no sign from Baal. At this point Elijah began to expose how ludicrous it was to cry out to a dead, manmade deity.  
**1 Kings 18:27 NAU** - "It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."
  - a. It was mockery at its finest.  
"Yell louder" – denying the presence of Baal.  
"Gone aside" – implying he has gone to relieve himself  
"Asleep" – describing the weakness of a god who needs to rest
  - b. The prophets of Baal were not deterred. They were infuriated and began to do cut themselves until they were covered with blood in order to entice their god.  
**1 Kings 18:28 NAU** - "So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them."
  - c. They continued into the evening. They must have been exhausted in their rantings and ravings. Still no word from Baal.  
**1 Kings 18:29 NAU** - "there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention."

B. It was time for Elijah to act

1. First, he called the people near – **Verse 30** – "Come near to me."  
This was the purpose of this altercation. Israel was to witness clearly the reality of the one true God.
  - a. True, God was judging the prophets of Baal. It is possible that many or most of these so-called prophets were Israelites—apostates who had abandoned God for the idolatry of Baalism.
  - b. But the main purpose was to stir Israel to repentance.

2. Elijah sets up his sacrifice – the ox and the wood.  
He sets up an altar of twelve stones. This was to be a restoration of covenant.  
**1 Kings 18:31 NAU** - "Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."
3. God had changed Jacob's name to Israel as a sign of His covenant.  
**Genesis 35:9-12 NAU** - "Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. <sup>10</sup> God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel. <sup>11</sup> God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. <sup>12</sup> "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you."
4. Then, in order to display the power of God, Elijah commands that water be poured over the wood. They filled four pitchers of water and poured it on. And then four more and then four more – twelve in total. Again with covenant implications of the 12 tribes.
5. Then Elijah offered a simple prayer  
**1 Kings 18:36 NAU** - "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word."
6. The purpose is clearly stated  
**1 Kings 18:36 NAU** - "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel "  
**1 Kings 18:37 NAU** - "that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again."

## II. Israel was stirred to repentance

- A. God clearly demonstrated His power. He alone is God.
  1. The preface of the Ten Commandments declare God's covenant promise  
**Exodus 20:2 NAU** - "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."  
This is followed by God's command of faithfulness to Him as God. This is commanded of all men.  
**Exodus 20:3 NAU** - "You shall have no other gods before Me."  
The Second Commandment is a warning against idolatry:  
**Exodus 20:5 NAU** - "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God"
  2. With Elijah's prayer came the demonstration of God's almighty power  
The fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, vaporized the water, and even dissolved the stones and even the dust. Everything was consumed.

3. In this great display of almighty power Baal was shown to be nothing while God is all in all, a consuming fire. Fire is the ultimate display of God's judgment.

**Isaiah 33:13-14 NAU** - "You who are far away, hear what I have done; And you who are near, acknowledge My might." <sup>14</sup> Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?"

**Lamentations 2:3-4 NAU** - "In fierce anger He has cut off All the strength of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand From before the enemy. And He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire Consuming round about. <sup>4</sup> He has bent His bow like an enemy; He has set His right hand like an adversary And slain all that were pleasant to the eye; In the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire."

**Hebrews 12:28-29 NAU** - "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; <sup>29</sup> for our God is a consuming fire."

B. Israel was shaken

1. They had spent years bowing before Baal who has just been proven powerless. Now God has displayed that He alone is God. Israel got the message.  
**1 Kings 18:39 NAU** - "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."
2. They were transformed from having nothing to say regarding their idolatry to confession magnified. In the Hebrew repetition strengthens a statement.
3. Immediately, they seized the prophets of Baal and executed them.

Conclusion:

1. God's forgiveness is always contingent upon repentance. Repentance is not a work to merit God's salvation, but God always stirs His people to repentance upon salvation.
2. God sent Elijah to Ahab. It was surely an opportunity for repentance. Instead, Ahab denies all responsibility and blames Elijah for Israel's troubles. Elijah, God's preacher of righteousness, turns the blame back on Ahab, but Ahab remains unrepentant.
3. But now, Israel is convinced of their sin, convinced of God's sovereign authority and turns back to God.
4. Sadly, Israel's repentance would be short lived. Gloriously, in the New Covenant, God brings about a permanent change of heart, where He writes His Law upon our hearts and remembers our sins no more.

