

"IF THE LORD BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM."

– I KINGS 18:21,30-46. – AUGUST 21. –

ELIJAH'S requirement of King Ahab, that the principal representatives of the ten tribes should gather at Mount Carmel, and with them the 450 priests of Baal, was promptly complied with. Ahab seemed to lose his bravado, and to realize that he was, in a general sense at least, subject to Elijah as the Lord's representative, and that the claim of the latter that the three and a half years of drouth was the penalty for idolatry seemed reasonable. He evidently understood that the test of the two religions was about to be made; but since Elijah was only one in contrast with so many priests of Baal, with the heads of all the tribes, and with the king and his courtiers, and since this seemed the only course open to secure the coveted rain, the king seems to have offered no objection.

The top of Mount Carmel, the place of meeting, was about seventeen miles from the palace at Jezreel. It was an ideal place for just such a spectacle as occurred there. It was probably a few days before the invited persons assembled, but when they were come together Elijah, in the audience of the people, proposed to the 450 priests of Baal a test to demonstrate whether Baal or Jehovah was God. Under the circumstances these men could evidently do nothing else than assent to the test, and it was an especially appropriate one, too; for Baal was noted for being preeminently the sun god, the god of nature, fertility, etc. The three and a half years of drouth already testified against Baal's power to bless the fields and flocks of his devotees with fertility and fruitfulness, and now, additionally, Elijah proposed that the god who would answer by fire should be esteemed the real one. The priests of Baal made ready an altar and laid upon it the sacrifice in the morning; then, after their custom, they prayed and importuned, sometimes in a loud voice and sometimes softly,

that Baal would answer and demonstrate his power by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice.

CALL LOUDLY ON BAAL. OUR GOD "HEARETH IN SECRET."

As the noon-day sun shone out scorchingly in that climate, not only the stones of their altar became hot, but the fat of the slain sacrifice must have been sizzling with heat, and it would have seemed to require very little to have accomplished their object. Tradition says that, after the manner of many of the deceptions of heathen religions, a man was placed inside of the altar with a view to his setting on fire the wood under the sacrifice at the appropriate moment; but the legend declares that he was subsequently found suffocated. At all events, according to the Scriptural account, as the day advanced beyond the time of noon, the priests of Baal became more and more desperate, calling, O Baal, hear us! hear us! As they cried aloud, Elijah made the scene still more impressive **[R3406 : page 233]** upon the minds of the elders of Israel by ironical remarks, suggesting that their god, Baal, was perhaps on a journey or perhaps asleep or what not, and he exhorted them to call still louder upon him. Chagrined, frenzied by their defeat, they called still more wildly, and ran about the altar after the manner of heathen priests in some parts until this day, yelling and cutting themselves, claiming that they had committed sins, that they would chastise themselves for these sins, and that Baal should thus be propitiated and hear and answer them. This continued until three o'clock in the afternoon, when Elijah proposed that in the cool of the evening he would make his test, assuring the people that Jehovah, who had withheld the rain, would demonstrate his power by sending the fire to burn the sacrifice offered in his name.

Elijah built an altar in the name of the Lord – that is, consecrated by prayer to the Lord. Presumably he had all the help necessary in its construction, and he added to it a feature not

common to altars, namely, that it had a trench round about which he caused to be filled with water from a never-failing spring which is to be found on the slope of Mount Carmel. Four earthen jars (misnamed in the text barrels) were filled and emptied three times, until the whole altar, wood and sacrifice were saturated and surrounded by water. This would be a demonstration to the heads of the nations that the miracle to be performed would be genuine. Then Elijah prayed to God, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."

The prayer is beautiful in its simplicity, manifesting that the Prophet had no boastful spirit in connection with his mission, but that humbly he recognized that he was merely a servant of the Lord. It showed, too, that his desire was not personal display of power, but the blessing of his nation and the drawing of their hearts to the Lord. The Lord responded, and fire from heaven came down in the sight of the people and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the earth with which the altar had been constructed, used as mortar, licking up the water in the trench. The people were convinced and gladly acknowledged the Lord Jehovah, thereby correspondingly denying Baal. It was a great victory for the cause of right, and would carry through the leaders of all the tribes full information to every quarter of the kingdom.

ELIJAH'S COURSE NOT OURS.

At Elijah's command the 450 prophets of Baal were caught ("Let not one of them escape") and at Elijah's direction they were executed at the foot of the mountain – at the brook whence the water had been brought for the sacrifice. Infidels have been inclined to comment upon this slaughter of the priests of Baal as representing persecution and religious fanaticism. We are to remember, however,

what we have already called attention to, namely, that God had peculiar dealings with this nation of Israel, and that Elijah, as the divine mouthpiece of the occasion, was fully commissioned to carry out the divine execution against these men, who had been exercising so baneful an influence among his people, leading them from light to darkness, from the worship of God to idolatry. This would give no right or authority to anybody at the present time to execute fellow creatures because of difference of religious belief, because the world in general today is not under an arrangement such as that which prevailed in Elijah's day between God and the one nation of Israel. Today civilization frames laws and has courts of justice which decide on penalties for violations of those laws – the death penalty being usually reserved for murder or treason. We are to remember that in the peculiar relationship between God and Israel, under their covenant made at Sinai, God himself was the King, the ruler of that nation; consequently these priests of Baal were traitors against him, and, according to the laws of our time, from this standpoint would be worthy of death.

However, there is a higher law than ours which we must recognize. It must be admitted that God is the proper judge of the whole world: that it is with him to say who may live and who may not. Were the world living today under the direct government of the Lord, and were there today a properly certified Prophet of the Lord whom, as the mouthpiece of God, we had no reason to doubt, it certainly would be entirely proper for us to hear the word of the Lord and execute his sentences on any and every subject to the fullest extent. But during this Gospel age – from the time God gave up the fleshly house of Israel and began the establishment of spiritual Israel – he has not claimed or exercised kingly authority in the world. On the contrary, he tells us that present governments, although they call themselves Christendom, are really "kingdoms of this world." He tells us to look forward to the future, to the second coming of Christ in power and great glory as the time for the establishment of the Kingdom of God under the whole heavens. He tells us that the

Kingdom thus established will be the antitypical kingdom, and assures us that when that time shall come a great blessing will come to the whole world – a blessing of knowledge of the Truth and of opportunity to serve it; and that whosoever will not heed the message at that time, whosoever will not avail himself of the glorious opportunities of that time, will be "cut off from amongst the people" in the Second Death. – Acts 3:22,23.

SIN SHOULD BE ACKNOWLEDGED.

It was customary in olden times that when a general sacrifice was offered it should be followed by a feast, and apparently while the sacrificing was in progress throughout the day a feast also had been prepared on the mountain top, and it is in reference to this that Elijah said to [R3407 : page 234] the king, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for I hear the sound of an abundance of rain." The Prophet may have been speaking figuratively, or possibly his words might be understood better, "I hear from the Lord the message of an abundance of rain coming." Ahab and his associates might much better have spent the time in fasting and prayer for divine forgiveness for the idolatry which had brought upon them the drouth, and which now had led to the execution of the priests of Baal. Nevertheless the Lord, through the Prophet, did not urge upon them any avowals of sorrow that they did not volunteer themselves. Herein is one of the distinct differences between those who are at heart the Lord's people and others. Imperfections and failures each one finds in himself continually, but those who are the Lord's true people feel so aggrieved at their failures that they are promptly led to the throne of grace that they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in future time of need, but others take their failures lightly and fail to profit by them accordingly.

As for the Lord's people, some of them can testify that their failures have really resulted in great blessing to their own souls and

great advancement in overcoming weaknesses. The sentiment of the consecrated is well expressed by the poet, who says:

"O! may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes."

While the king and the heads of the tribes were feasting Elijah was praying for the rain and waiting for it. Seven times in all he sent his servant to look in the direction from which the rain storms usually came, to see whether or not anything in the nature of a cloud was visible in the clear sky, and only at the last did he get the favorable report that his servant saw a cloud about the size of a man's hand rising in the west. Here we see beautifully blended the part of God and the part of man in respect to prayer. Elijah did not pray for rain until he understood that the Lord's time had come to send rain: then he prayed with all earnestness and expectancy – with confidence; for we cannot doubt that the one who built the altar and flooded it with water and expected and witnessed the consuming of the sacrifice by fire from heaven would be full of confidence respecting the sending of rain, for which, nevertheless, he prayed. Just so it is with the Lord's people today in the matter of prayer. God has definitely promised us certain things, and these we may as positively expect and may appropriately request; other things, however, not promised, we are not to expect.

WHERE CHRIST IS HIS WORD IS STUDIED.

This is the key to our Master's words, "If ye abide in me and my Word abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." For us to have the ear of the Lord it is requisite that we shall abide in Christ – as members of his body, and through him children of the Father. It is necessary also that his Word abide in us – that we study the Lord's promise, that we know what he has promised, so that we may ask only those things which he has already declared to us he is pleased to grant. Just another suggestion respecting what we may ask and what we may not request in prayer,

leaving the fuller examination of the subject to another time. We may not ask the conversion of our friends, because the Lord has not told us thus to pray. He set us no such example, neither did the apostles, and the entire teaching of the Scriptures is to the contrary. We may, however, with propriety pray for wisdom and grace upon our hearts and upon our lips, that we may know how to present the Lord's message clearly and forcefully and convincingly to those we love and desire to see brought under the influence of the Truth. The Lord's arrangement is, "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free."

God's arrangement is, further, that the Truth shall not be injected into our minds in some miraculous manner when this is unnecessary, but that it shall be proclaimed by those who already have learned it. Hence the preaching of the Gospel is the Lord's means by which he is pleased to grant the blessing of his Truth and through his Truth his grace, during this Gospel age, to those who are in a proper attitude of heart to receive the same. Take another illustration: We are not taught to pray for money or luxuries, but we may labor and ask the Lord's blessing upon our labors, and such guidance of them as would be best, with a heart ready to receive with thankfulness much or little as the Lord may see best for us. Our only request may be for the absolute necessities as expressed in our Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." We may also pray with propriety, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," and may be sure that in the Lord's due time this petition, which has gone up for eighteen centuries to the throne of grace, shall be answered, and showers of blessing shall come from the presence of the Lord during the second presence of our King, flooding the world with times of restitution of all things.

When the little cloud was seen and reported to Elijah, a message was at once sent to the king to hasten his return to the palace before the great downpour of rain should come. The king evidently believed Elijah implicitly and made haste homeward. Elijah,

apparently endowed with supernatural power, ran ahead of the king's horses as an act of courtesy, and as showing that he as a servant of the Lord nevertheless recognized Ahab as the king of the nation. Thus to some extent the shame and confusion of the king's position throughout the day was offset on his return home.

BE OF GOOD COURAGE.

A general lesson may be drawn from these incidents by the Lord's people of the New Creation today. The Elijah-like class have the lessons of courage and faithfulness and trust. Let us be strong in the Lord and in the [R3407 : page 235] power of his might; let us speak his word plainly and show forth on every suitable occasion and by every proper means the glories of him who hath called us from darkness to light. It is not for us to vanquish the enemies of the Truth and put them to death as did Elijah, but it is for us to slay and utterly expose the errors and follies which are deceiving the people. The Lord's little ones, as the Scriptures declare, may be mighty through his power to the pulling down of the strongholds of error and to the turning back of the tide of deception and sin from those who are in the reasonable attitude of mind to receive the Truth – those who are merely deceived into error and not willingly and wilfully its followers and beneficiaries.

There is a great lesson here, too, for those who are today more or less bound by error, and confused and thereby led to render worship to that which is false. Infidelity in our day is calling upon many to worship the god of nature; and, through higher criticism and evolution theories, the priests of error are misleading and deceiving many in spiritual Israel who really desire to know the Truth. The Lord is making an exhibit today as between Truth and Error, which is in many respects as astonishing and miraculous as the demonstration made at Elijah's hands. The Truth today is shining out clearly, the sacrifice of the Lord's people is being accepted, demonstrations of the Truth and of the servants of the Truth are

everywhere being manifested. It is time for all who have been in any measure of darkness on the subject to scrutinize the evidences carefully and to decide as did the representatives of Israel, "The Lord he is God" – and to decline henceforth to recognize the errors of Babylon and the messages of her prophets, which are being demonstrated to be false. It is time for all to come to a decision whether they are for the Lord or whether they prefer to worship false systems and errors. In the language of our Golden Text, If the Lord be God let us follow him – thoroughly, completely. Let us not only be sincere, but earnest in our religion. Let it take hold upon all the affairs of our lives, and, as the Apostle expressed it, not only let it direct our conduct and words, but back of this, our very thoughts. To use his language, "Let us bring even our thoughts into captivity to the will of God in Christ."

