

THE PRAYER-ANSWERING GOD

– *I KINGS 18:1-40.* – *FEBRUARY 12.* –

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." – Joshua 24:15.

THE word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year instructing him to manifest himself to King Ahab, with a view to the termination of the drouth. This may have been the third year of the Prophet's sojourn at Zarephath, or it may have been the third year after Elijah's announcement to Ahab. The land of Israel may already have been experiencing a six-months' drouth when Elijah announced to the king that no rain was to be expected until he, as God's servant, would announce it or bring it. In any event we have the assurance that the entire period of drouth was three and a half years. – Luke 4:25; James 5:17.

When the time was fulfilled God directed Elijah to present himself to King Ahab, because the time had come when God was willing to relieve the drouth – when a sufficiency of punishment had come upon the Israelites for their iniquities – when at least some of them had been called to their senses, reminded of their Covenant with the Lord and his engagement to give them blessings or adversities, according to their obedience. On arriving at the palace Elijah called for the Royal Superintendent, or Prime Minister, Obadiah. He was a godly man and, of course, distressed by the idolatrous course of the King and the Queen. If he was not sufficiently courageous to protest openly, he was, nevertheless, courageous, for, in a time when the servants of Jehovah were being persecuted to death by Queen Jezebel, Obadiah hid one hundred of them and supplied them with the necessities of life – evidently at the risk of his all. When Obadiah met Elijah and was told to tell the King that Elijah was there to see him, Obadiah feared to do so. He declared that himself and others had searched the entire country over most carefully to find Elijah and found him not. He realized that the Lord had hidden him. He protested that if now he would declare that Elijah was ready to see the King, the probabilities were that, by the time

the King would get there, the spirit or power of the Lord would somehow carry Elijah away. Then the King, infuriated, would cause Obadiah's death; but Elijah reassured him.

When the King met Elijah his first word was, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" This is the worldly custom. The fearless minister who tells the Truth and relates the Divine prophecy respecting the rewards of evil-doing is held accountable, as though he had caused the trouble. But Elijah was not intimidated. He promptly answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy parents' house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed Baal. Three years before the King would have probably ordered the execution of Elijah; but the fulfillment of his word and the pangs of hunger had humbled him. He was anxious that the blight should be removed and responded to the demands of Elijah that the eight hundred and fifty prophets of idolatrous Baalism should meet at Mt. Carmel and that thither all the people of Israel, represented by their chief men, should also assemble. The design, evidently, was a contest between Elijah, the representative of God, and these murderous priests of Baal, proteges of Queen Jezebel.

"CHOOSE YE THIS DAY"

This gathering of the priests and of the prophets required time, but was finally accomplished. When the meeting convened Elijah declared that it was time to have a testing and showing as to who really was God, Jehovah or Baal. The test was to be that two altars were to be built and two bullocks were to be sacrificed. The Baalites were to provide the bullocks themselves and to make choice of the one for their own altar. Whichever God would answer by fire and accept the offering, would be acknowledged as the only true God. The proposition was so fair and reasonable that the prophets of Baal could not refuse it.

To them came the first opportunity. They had the noontime opportunity, when the fierce heat of the sun seemed almost warm enough to set fire to the fat of the bullock. They prayed; they shrieked; they cut themselves with knives, entreating that Baal would answer by

fire and prove himself the mighty god. Hour after hour this proceeded until evening, when they were forced to give over and admit their inability.

Then came Elijah's turn. He commanded that water be brought and that the altar which he was to use should be thoroughly flooded with water. No one must have room to say that there was a secret smoulder of fire beneath. And, since the sun had gone down, no one could claim a spontaneous combustion. Then Elijah prayed calmly, earnestly, reverently and the Divine answer came – a fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice and licking up the water in the trough of the altar.

Then the people recognized the difference. They fell on their faces and said, Jehovah is The God! A great lesson had been learned.

A lesson for us is that the masses of Christendom are deceived today, as were the masses of Israel then. And when, by and by, God shall open their eyes of understanding through the agency of Messiah's Kingdom, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. The knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth.

Complying with the Lord's direction through Elijah, the Israelites slew all the prophets of Baal. We are not to understand this to represent the Divine command to us today to put all false teachers to death. We are to remember, as before suggested, that Israel was a special nation with which God dealt in a special manner, and that many of their doings, under Divine direction, were typical of higher things to be accomplished in God's Kingdom. Ultimately, after full opportunity, every false teacher and every wilful sinner will be destroyed. "All the wicked will God destroy." The death of those priests of Baal foreshadowed the destruction in the Second Death of all who work iniquity; but those priests themselves did not suffer the Second Death. Like all the remainder of Adam's race, their resurrection from the dead was provided for at Calvary, and they, as well as all others, must be brought to a knowledge of the Truth and to an opportunity of reconciliation to God. Following this denouncement came the long-desired rain, not only

physically refreshing, but also showing a return of Divine favor. It fell on the evil and on the good, to make both better.

"When clouds hang heavy o'er thy way,
And darker grows the weary day,
And thou oppressed by anxious care
Art almost tempted to despair,
Still wait upon the Lord.

"When friends betray thy loving trust,
And thou art humbled in the dust,
When dearest joys from thee have fled,
And Hope within thy heart lies dead,
Still wait upon the Lord.

"Whate'er thy care, believe his word;
In joy or grief, trust in the Lord.
Good courage he will give to thee,
And strong, indeed, thy heart shall be,
By waiting on the Lord."

