

## Bible Workshop: Readers' comments

Regarding Discussion point 3 on John 13, which poses the question, "What purpose does [the washing of the disciples' feet] serve as an event in the light of Jesus' teaching here?" (Jun. 2005, p. 198), the following comments have been received.

I would like reverently to suggest that the washing of the disciples' feet was a prelude to the greater humility of the cross so soon to come, and was to teach "his own" (v. 1) not to seek to be the greatest (Lk. 22:24) but to recognise that the way of humility and loving obedience was the way of the Father. This love in its pure goodness was shown by Jesus in his complete obedience and loving submission, "even [to] the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

His victory over the flesh, his complete surrender to his Father's will, his absolute trust in his Father, glorify both Jesus and his Father; and the character Jesus revealed, in showing mercy and wonderful

grace in the face of such wickedness of man, also glorified God (Jno. 13:31). The crucifixion of Jesus revealed the furthest extent that the wickedness in man could reach (Acts 2:23). Sin could only bruise him in the heel (Gen. 3:15), and sin was condemned in Jesus' victory, which opened the way for the forgiveness of "his own" for his sake (Isa. 53:11). Jesus showed God's glory on earth, gently teaching "his own" the way to follow in love and humility.

Regarding Discussion point 1, "Discuss the role of satan and the devil in this chapter", the Jewish elders had found that Judas would betray Jesus by aiding them to get him into their power. The inner weakness of Judas responded to their offer of money, for "he was a thief" (Jno. 12:6). The lust for gain became sin, the devil, and blinded his eyes so that he betrayed his master. This showed an utter want of appreciation of our Lord's character and his loving provision for the cleansing of sins. (Taken in part from Brother John Carter's book **The Gospel of John**.)

Frances Gladstone

# Lessons from the life of Elijah

## 13. "Thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kgs. 18:36-40)

Stephen Whitehouse

*The scene on Mount Carmel now moves to its dramatic climax as, in response to the fervent prayer of Elijah, fire descends from heaven and consumes Elijah's burnt offering. God being vindicated before the people, the false prophets of Baal are put to death by the River Kishon.*

**T**HOUGH TERRIFYING scenes of God's judgement may momentarily convince us, often something far greater is required to turn our hearts "in the way of righteousness" (Prov. 8:20; 12:28; 16:31). For a sinner to be truly converted, it is not sufficient merely to observe a miracle, but rather a work must be wrought in their heart by the Word of God. Only by such can one be truly born again (Jno. 3:3,7; 1 Pet. 1:23).

### "Elijah the prophet came near"

Finally, after all the patient waiting on Carmel, "it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near" (1 Kgs. 18:36).

The prophet surely deliberately tarried till the time of the evening sacrifice in order to remind the children of Israel of the necessity of fellowship with the worshippers at Jerusalem, their brethren in the south. Though he stood not in the appointed place, he chose the appointed time. And, although the prophet believed he would be answered by fire, he feared not to stand by the altar.

Observe that this faithful servant is now referred to as "Elijah the prophet" (v. 36; cf. Mal. 4:5), rather than "the Tishbite" (1 Kgs. 17:1), or even the "man of God" (vv. 18,24). The man from Gilead now takes on the role of prophet and priest, prophesying concerning the rain from heaven and mediating through the provision of the sin offering for the people.

We again witness Elijah as a wonderful type of the Lord Jesus Christ, for our Master was both "a Prophet" (Deut. 18:15,18; cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37) and "High Priest" (Heb. 3:1; 5:5; 9:11).

Elijah then cried aloud, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel . . ." (1 Kgs. 18:36). The great prophet brought to mind the solemn

covenant Yahweh had made with Abraham (Gen. 17:7,8), the “father of many nations” (v. 4,5; cf. Rom. 4:17,18), which He later renewed with Isaac and Jacob. This was at the kernel of Elijah’s faith, and he desired that it would be shared with the people.

Of interest, this expression “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel [Jacob]” had been used only once before, and significantly it was by God Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:15). Here Elijah was also calling for a Divine flame to be made manifest, but on this occasion totally to consume the altar that stood before him.

### “Thou art the LORD God”

Elijah uttered forth his Divine appeal: “Hear [*’anah*] me, O LORD, hear [*’anah*] me” (1 Kgs. 18:37). The verb *’anah* can alternatively be rendered as ‘to answer’, ‘to respond’, ‘to testify’, ‘to speak’, ‘to shout’ or ‘to respond as a witness’. Elijah desired that God would respond in such a way that it would be a clear witness to the whole gathered assembly. The Septuagint has a lovely rendering of this phrase: “Hear me, O Lord, hear me this day by fire”. Elijah now called upon his God, desiring that He would be known in a flaming fire, as at Horeb and the burning bush (Ex. 3:2).

But what was Elijah seeking in prayer? What was his overwhelming desire and motivation? It was “that this people may know that Thou art the LORD God” (1 Kgs. 18:37). This was the desperate desire of Elijah’s heart: that God would demonstrate that He alone was the true God of Israel. Essentially, this was the prophet’s *raison d’être*, to glorify God in all aspects of his life.

Again we are reminded of the principle of God-manifestation. The prophet did not seek his own glory, for “no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29), but simply that, like Moses before him, Israel should “know that the LORD hath sent [him] to do all these works” (Num. 16:28).

Is not this what we long for more than anything else, that God might be glorified, that “[His] will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10)? This was the very desire of our Master. During the days of his flesh he longingly requested: “Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee” (Jno. 17:1).

We too should “seek not [our] own glory” (8:50), nor the glory of men, for those who do this “have their reward” (Mt. 6:2); rather we should “seek for glory and honour and immortality” in the life to come, even “eternal life” (Rom. 2:7). We

should long for the time when “the earth [is] filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

### “Thou hast turned their heart back again”

Monitor closely the words uttered in prayer by Elijah: “Thou hast turned their [Israel’s] heart back again” (1 Kgs. 18:37). Notice that the prophet’s faith was such that he fervently believed that God had already responded and “turned their heart”.

This is one of the principles by which God deals with His children, that they must fundamentally trust that God “is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). It is such that God blesses and magnifies. Recall the words of Jesus: “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk. 9:23). Remember also the faithful acts of the woman at Zarephath, who believed before she was blessed from heaven (1 Kgs. 17:11,15).<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless the prophet would later discover that Israel’s heart had not been permanently turned. It will be Elijah’s future responsibility to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6).<sup>2</sup> Herein is the prophet’s lifelong mission, the complete and enduring conversion of Israel so that they are finally “grafted into their own olive tree” (Rom. 11:24). This will be when the hand of God will “put [His] law in [Israel’s] inward parts, and write it in their hearts . . . and they shall be [His] people” (Jer. 31:33).

### “Then the fire of the LORD fell”

While Elijah uttered his prayer, silence reigned in the assembly. Among the crowd every heart raced feverishly. Each face had an expression of excitement and high expectation. And on this particular occasion God found it fit to respond in great measure, with a startling revelation, here conveyed in the most understated of Divine expressions: “Then the fire of the LORD fell” (1 Kgs. 18:38). Lo, the Almighty answered His faithful servant!

This short and sincere prayer had ascended to heaven and the prophet was answered. Mark well in Elijah’s actions the power of faith, and in our heavenly Father’s the efficacy of prayer.

The fire of God fell and “consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and

1. See [Oct. 2004, p. 385](#).

2. See [Apr. 2005, p. 107](#).

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**Statue of Elijah at Muhraka on Mount Carmel, the traditional site of the events of 1 Kings 18. He is shown with raised sword ready to kill the prophets of Baal.**

the dust" (v. 38), yet the children of Israel were spared. Observe also the downward action of the fire, contrary to nature itself. This was no natural phenomenon, but in every way an inexplicable flame emanating from God Himself (cf. Lev. 9:24; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1).

Even the twelve stones were consumed. The fire also "licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kgs. 18:38), lapping up the pools of water and drawing them up as a vapour. Nothing could resist its influence. This miracle from heaven was for all to observe and hearken to, for "all the people saw it" (v. 39). Not one member of the audience could possibly fail to miss this spectacular event, nor would they ever forget it.

#### **"The LORD, He is the God"**

But what would the people do after observing this wondrous miracle? "They fell on their faces" (v. 39), that is, they prostrated themselves in an act of the utmost respect. This was reminiscent of the events at the consecration of the altar under the Law (Lev. 9:24).

They evidently recognised in the fire the token of His Divine presence, and they could no longer doubt His existence. Through this miracle God not only accredited Elijah as His servant, as He had done with Moses (Ex. 3:14), but also proved

Himself to be the living God, Whom Israel was to serve.

The children of Israel could not contain their excitement, and reacted immediately with their verdict in united chorus: "The LORD, He is the God; the LORD, He is the God" (1 Kgs. 18:39). Without doubt, the contest between Yahweh and Baal had now been settled. Indeed, this phrase was an echo of the challenge itself: "the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God" (v. 24). What is more, it is almost identical to the phrase which was previously used of what Israel came to recognise at Horeb (Deut. 4:35,39; cf. 7:9; 10:17).

So here on Mount Carmel the children of Israel were acknowledging a relationship that had once existed and now had been rekindled. The God of Israel was their Elohim. Elijah surely would have rejoiced when he heard these words uttered.

But the question remains, Had the children of Israel truly ascribed this startling visitation to God, or had they turned the name of the prophet into a cry of victory—'Eli-Jah-hu, Eli-Jah-hu'—thus giving Elijah, whose name means 'My God is the LORD [Yahweh]',<sup>3</sup> the praise, honour and glory?

3. See [Jul. 2004, p. 271](#).

### “Take the prophets of Baal”

We may well ask, How does a faithful prophet react to such a glorious visitation from the hand of the living God? How would we respond to such a spontaneous burst of chorus and acclaim? With Elijah there was no delay. He refused to bask in the glory of his victory.

Instead the prophet immediately summoned the children of Israel to “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape” (1 Kgs. 18:40). He desired the utter destruction of all the false prophets there assembled. Their time of judgement had now arrived. Note, though, that 400 prophets of the groves had also been summoned (v. 19); they were not executed, but were to be reserved as instruments of Ahab’s final downfall (22:6,34-38).

Here observe the people being ready enough to comply with Elijah’s request. Why was this so? Surely it was because they now perceived the abominable deception of these “false prophets”, who had come in amongst them “in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly [were] ravening wolves” (Mt. 7:15). So the prophet of God led all the prophets of Baal down to the brook Kishon and slew them there.

Let us not question Elijah’s motives or actions. For this indeed is the Divine principle: judgement prepares the way for blessing. Yet what a gruesome sight! But such was God’s will. Elijah was merely executing Divine justice according to the Law, a code that prohibited idolatry on pain of death and commanded that false prophets should be destroyed (Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13:5). Elijah certainly would have much preferred to be God’s instrument of conversion rather than destruction. Yet because of the honour of God he denied his natural feelings.

Under the Law the responsibility of executing such judgement fell primarily to the sovereign authority. But Ahab, the king of Israel, had been corrupted; he himself was an idolater, so it fell to Elijah to be the law-enforcer. Yet a precedent had already been established when Phinehas slew Zimri and Cozbi (Num. 25:8). What did the Spirit record of Phinehas? That he was “zealous [*qana*] for his God” (v. 13). And how wonderful that Elijah would later use virtually the same expression of himself: “I have been very jealous [*qana*] for the LORD God of hosts” (1 Kgs. 19:10,14)! Like Phinehas, Elijah too made “atonement for the children of Israel” (Num. 25:13; cf. 1 Kgs. 18:36).

### The ‘River of Slaughter’

The Kishon is the stream that drains the western end of the plain of Jezreel and flows by Mount Carmel. Today the river bears the name in Arabic *Nahr el Mukatta*, meaning the ‘River of Slaughter’. How fitting, since this was the scene of two great victories, both wrought by Almighty God for Israel!

It was not only the spot where the 450 prophets of Baal were slaughtered, but was also where a great battle was fought between Barak and the evil Sisera, “the captain of Jabin’s army” (Judg. 4:7,13). Sisera’s name means ‘A battle array’, and his mighty battle array constituted 900 chariots of iron (vv. 3,13). Yet, in the Name of the God of Israel, Barak and his men still prevailed and conquered Sisera’s armies, here at the Kishon (vv. 15,16; cf. 5:20,21).

These momentous events of the past surely point to a greater time to come. For this ‘valley of slaughter’ will be revisited, in type, when another great ‘battle array’ will be destroyed and the flesh conquered.

This time it will involve the Lord Jesus Christ, who, just as Elijah had done, will also remove all false prophets, when he returns to the earth (Zech. 13:3). In that day he will “go forth, and fight against those nations” (14:3). This is commonly referred to as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), referring, as Brother Thomas explains it, to the time when a ‘heap of sheaves [*arma*]’ will be threshed in ‘a valley [*gai*]’ of ‘judgement [*don*]’. This symbolic name indicates that the nations will be gathered together for the purposes of threshing, a symbol of Divine judgement (Isa. 41:14-16; Dan. 2:35; Joel 3:13; Mic. 4:12,13; Hab. 3:12,13).

As the corpses of the prophets of Baal lay lifeless in a valley, so will the armies of the Gogian host when the greater than Elijah comes. For God has declared: “I will give unto Gog a place . . . of graves in Israel . . . and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamon-gog” (Ezek. 39:11).

So a re-enactment of the past events at Kishon will take place, but with the Lord Jesus Christ at the helm. It will not be confined to the ‘valley of slaughter’, however, for all nations of the earth will shake, and will experience the wrath of Almighty God: “Thus will I magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD” (38:23).

(To be continued)