

The Rains Returns to Israel

1 Kings 18:41-46

1 Kings 18:41-46 – *“Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.” So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked, and said, “There is nothing.” And seven times he said, “Go again.”*

Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’”

Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”

Background Notes

1 Kings 18:41-46 describes the return of the rain to the land of Israel after 3 ½ years of drought, and the race between King Ahab and the prophet Elijah from Mount Carmel to Jezreel, where wicked Queen Jezebel was waiting.

The great confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal was over. In no uncertain terms, God had showed His power over the pagan gods by sending His fire down upon Elijah’s sacrifice on the altar of the Lord at Mount Carmel. The people of Israel now, at least temporarily, had turned back to the Lord and proclaimed, *“The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!”* (v39). The false prophets of the false god Baal had been defeated and eliminated.

Then the rains returned to the land of Israel, just as God had promised. God had withheld the rain for 3 ½ years, in accordance with His covenant stipulations. The Law said that God would stop the rain if His people turned away from Him. (Deuteronomy 11 and 28).

When the rains returned, it looked like the people of the northern kingdom of Israel just might turn back, and return to the Lord in a big way. Unfortunately their change of heart was short-lived. Nevertheless, in His grace God allowed the rains to return in answer to Elijah’s prayers.

Verse 44 says that a growing storm moved in from the Mediterranean Sea. Elijah told the servant to tell Ahab, *“Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.”* Then *“the power of the Lord came upon Elijah; and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel”*(v46).

Jezebel was the winter capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, about 20 miles away from Mount Carmel. Elijah tucked his cloak into his belt and outran Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel! Elijah was operating under supernatural power to outrun Ahab's chariot. And possibly Ahab's chariot was slowed down in the Jezreel valley by the results of the cloudburst. In any case, they arrived at Jezreel - and that's where Jezebel was waiting. She was about to hear the news about what had happened to her prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.

Doctrinal Points

1. Spiritual people are sensitive to the sound of rain.

Verse 41: *"Then Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.'* Did Elijah hear the wind start to pick up, or distant thunder, or something like that? No. Verse 43 says that there was no natural indication that a storm was coming. Elijah told his servant, *"Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing."*

Well then, how did Elijah know a storm was on the way? Did God give him special insight that rain was coming, even though Ahab and the others were not aware? Yes, we believe that's exactly what this statement means.

Elijah was sensitive to what God was going to do. Elijah was sensitive to "the sound of the abundance of rain": *"There is the sound of abundance of rain."* Elijah knew why God had stopped the rains, and he knew that problem had been dealt with. Elijah knew that God had promised that the rains would return. 1 Kings 18:1, *"And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'"*

Elijah was sensitive to the sound of rain because he knew the Lord, and he knew the word of God. And Elijah was walking in obedience to the Lord and in obedience to God's revealed word, and thus He had insight into God's program.

What a contrast we see in Ahab! Ahab certainly was not sensitive to the sound of rain! Ahab was sensitive to eating and drinking. Verse 42: *"So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees."* Ahab was eating - but Elijah was praying.

There's a spiritual truth here for us. Spiritual people are sensitive to "the sound of rain." ***The rain was the sign of God's blessing*** returning to the land. Spiritual people are sensitive to conditions that are necessary for God's blessings to come upon His people. Spiritual people know what God's Word says. They are in tune with the programs and plans of God.

Spiritual people know, for example, that God's blessing of revival does not come through flashy programs, promotional gimmicks and slick advertising techniques. They know there's no substitute for prayer and godly living.

Elijah was a spiritual man. He was sensitive to the blessing that God was about to bring on the land. Spiritual people are sensitive to the sound of rain.

2. Faith sees God's hand behind man's hand.

In verses 43-44 Elijah said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again." Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'"

Faith sees God's hand behind man's hand. To the natural eye there was nothing at first. Then just a little cloud on the horizon. But that was all Elijah needed! Faith doesn't need overwhelming evidence. Elijah knew that this was the return of the rain that God had promised!

Once again we see a spiritual truth for us to grasp. Faith sees God's hand behind man's hand. For example, in recent years we've seen the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the break up of the Soviet Union. The world sees this as the work of man's hand – the combination of the foreign policies of western nations, and the desire for human freedom within Eastern Europe and Russia. The world sees the factors that brought about this amazing change as just the work of man's hand.

But faith sees God's hand behind man's hand. Faith sees these events as an answer to prayer. Faith sees not just the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the break up of the Soviet Union. Faith sees open doors to the gospel, after years of prayer!

And people of faith are doing something about it. Thousands of Bibles have been brought into the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Support for missions in those areas of the world has increased. Eyes of faith always see God's hand behind man's hand.

Practical Applications

1. Do you have eyes of faith that see God's hand behind man's hand?

That's a question we all need to ask ourselves. Look around you. Do you see the events in your town, or at your workplace, or on your campus as natural happenings and man's hand at work? Or do you have eyes of faith, and see God's hand at work, opening doors and creating opportunities for you to serve Him?

Do you have eyes of faith? Do you have eyes of faith that see God's hand behind man's hand?

2. Let's pray as if the outcome depended on us!

Elijah already had God's promise that the rains would return. Verse 1: *"And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'"*

There it is - the promise of God: *"I will send rain..."* So Elijah already had the promise of God that the rain would return, but still ***he prayed as if the outcome depended on his prayers!***

What was Elijah doing while his servant is going back and forth, seven times, to look out over the Mediterranean Sea to see if there were any clouds out on the horizon? He was praying. He was praying fervently. He was persevering in prayer.

Elijah persevered in prayer as if the return of the rains depended on his prayers. James 5:17-18 indicate that God answered Elijah's prayers. *"And he (Elijah) prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."* Even though God had promised to send rain, the Bible indicates that the outcome was an answer to Elijah's prayer!

We don't know how prayer works, but we do know that God answers prayer! Even though God knows everything, and even though we know that He is in full control, we should pray as if the outcome depended on us.

Maybe you're praying right now for a friend or a relative who is not a believer. How should you pray? Pray as if the outcome depended on you! We know God knows all about the situation. We know there's the doctrine of "election." We know that your friend or relative has a free will. But pray as if the outcome depended on you!

Like Elijah, we should persevere in fervent prayer - as if the outcome depended on us. Let's trust the Lord fully - but let's pray as if the outcome depended on us!