

Handout: 1 Kings Lesson 7

Elijah is the protagonist in three stories which Bible scholars refer to as the “Elijah cycle”:

1. 1 Kings 17:1-19:21 ~ The first story begins with the drought called down upon the region by Elijah in God’s divine name and escalates into a contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal. The story ends with Elijah’s encounter with Yahweh at Mt. Horeb/Sinai and the call of Elisha.
2. 1 Kings 21:1-29 ~ The second story concerns the murder of righteous Naboth in a conspiracy to claim his land, and Elijah’s prophecy of doom for both King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.
3. 2 Kings 1:1-2:1-18 ~ The third story concerns the final confrontation between Ahab and Elijah, the ascension of Elijah into heaven, and the succession of Elijah by his servant Elisha.

Chapter 17, in the first part of the Elijah cycle, is composed of three episodes concerning Elijah’s activities during the three year drought and three miracles within that period:

1. Elijah seeking refuge in Wadi Cherith and the miracle of the ravens (17:1-7).
2. Elijah finding refuge with a Gentile widow in Sidonia and the miracle of unending supply of oil and meal (17:8-16).
3. The miracle of Elijah resurrecting a widow’s son (17:17-24).

Chapter 18 is the continuation of the Elijah cycle part I and is composed of three events:

1. Elijah’s meeting with Obadiah, servant of Ahab and servant of Yahweh (18:1-16a).
2. Elijah’s confrontation with king Ahab and victory over the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel (18:16b-40).
3. The end of the drought (18:41-46).

Examples of holy fire from heaven in the Old Testament:

1. God showed His approval when He lit the fire on the altar at the first liturgical worship service after the dedication of the desert Sanctuary (Lev 9:24).
2. God killed the two elder sons of Aaron with fire for willfully offering the holy incense improperly (Lev 10:1-2).
3. In the rebellion of the Levites led by Korah, God destroyed the rebels with holy fire (Num 16:35).
4. Fire from the staff of the angel of Yahweh consumed Gideon’s offerings as a divine sign (Judg 6:21).
5. In approval, God lit the fire of the altar David built on Mt. Moriah (1 Chr 21:26)
6. God showed His approval by lighting the altar fire during the first liturgical service in the Jerusalem Temple (2 Chr 7:3).
7. God sent fire from heaven to consume Elijah’s sacrifice and the entire altar (1 Kng 18:38).

What three symbols of the Holy Spirit are present in the miracle of the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the end of the drought?

1. The fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifice to Yahweh (verse 38).
2. The cloud that brought the rain (verse 44).
3. The water that renewed the earth and ended the drought (verse 45).

The cloud brought the rain in the same way the Holy Spirit will renew mankind with the symbol of water and new life in Christian baptism. Fire, water, and cloud are all symbols of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit (see CCC 555, 697 = cloud; 696 = fire; and 694, 1137, 2652 = water), and all three symbols are present in the story in chapter 18.

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