



23. SHOWDOWN OF THE EMPIRES: Who Will Be In Control

Israel was caught in the grip of one of the worst droughts they had suffered. It all began 3½ years before when Elijah the prophet walked unannounced and uninvited into the palace of the king, stood before Ahab and said, “There will be no rain in Israel until God says so through me.” With that he turned on his heels, strode out of the palace and vanished. Ahab hunted him like a dog, but for 3½ years God protected and provided for Elijah’s needs in the desert and in the region of Phoenicia (1 Kings 17). Exactly 3½ years later God told Elijah to summon all Israel to the top of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Elijah appeared to King Ahab, while the king was looking for water for his horses. “Are you the one who has caused trouble for Israel?” said the king. “No it is not me, but you who have caused the problems for Israel,” replied Elijah. “You have disobeyed God’s commandments and led Israel to worship Baal. You are the cause of all the problems.” Some years before this, King Ahab had married a Phoenician princess called Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). She had brought Baal worship into Israel with all its perverted forms of religious worship, such as child sacrifice and temple prostitution. She led Israel to turn from God and following His will and ways. “Now,” Elijah boldly commanded the king, “get all of Israel to the top of Mt Carmel. And bring with you the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah.” Ahab dared not disobey.

Elijah stood before the people, and cried out, “How long are you people going to waver between two opinions? If Jehovah is God, then follow Him. But if Baal is God then follow him.” “Make up your mind,” the prophet was saying. “Who is your God - Jehovah or Baal?” You must make a choice. But the people answered him not so much as a word. Elijah then proposed a test to see who should be Israel’s God – Baal or Jehovah. He suggested that each group – he and the prophets of Baal take a bullock. Kill it. Cut it up and put it on an altar of wood and stone. Then each would call on their God to show he was God by sending fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice. The God who answered by sending fire would be the God of Israel. Elijah proposed that there be a “*Showdown of the gods.*” The people thought this was a fair thing, so the test began. He suggested that the prophets of Baal and Asherah go first. There were more of them, so they should be given first chance. With the people watching, the 850 priests of Baal and Asherah killed their bullock, cut it up, placed it on their altar and called for their god to send fire. They cried till they were hoarse. “Cry louder,” mocked Elijah. Baal is supposed to be the god who helps the crops grow by sending rain and sunshine. Cry louder,” he taunted. “Perhaps he is taking a nap. Cry louder and wake him up. Maybe he has gone for a walk and you need to cry louder to get his attention and bring him back.” But the Bible says there was no response. Baal had failed Israel in the drought. As the god of the weather, he should have brought rain. Now he was seen to be impotent. In the afternoon the 850 prophets danced around the altar, cut themselves with knives to make the blood flow, hoping that Baal would take pity on them and send down the fire. But there was nothing! As the shadows lengthened in the late afternoon, the prophets of Baal slunk away defeated and dejected. My friend, the gods of this world – the gods of pleasure, materialism, sport, fame and sex – always leave the human heart empty. They do not bring lasting happiness and answers to the big questions of life.

At the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah stepped forward, came over to a broken down, disused altar of God, called the people to gather around him and then slowly rebuilt the altar of Jehovah while everyone watched on. Then he took a bullock, killed it and placed it on the wood on the altar. He called for barrels of water to be poured over the sacrifice. Three times he had water poured on the altar until the whole thing was a soggy mush. Then at the time of the evening sacrifice, when the lambs were offered in the temple, he prayed a very simple prayer, “*O Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your*

command. Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that these people may know that you, Jehovah, are God, and that you have turned their heart back again” (1 Kings 18:36,37). There was a blinding flash and fire shot down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the water, leaving just a hole in the ground. Immediately the people proclaimed, “Jehovah is God.” Elijah killed all the prophets of Baal because they had led the nation away from God. Shortly after, Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11,12).

What an amazing story! However what is more amazing is that the Bible appears to predict that just before the second coming of Jesus, Elijah the prophet will return (Malachi 4:5,6). Does this mean that Elijah is to return bodily to our planet? When John the Baptist came preaching, Jesus seemed to suggest that he was Elijah (Matthew 11:13, 14). However John told the Jews he was not Elijah (John 1:21). So who was right – Jesus or John the Baptist? Both were correct, because Luke explains that Jesus meant that John the Baptist came in the same spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). John came with an Elijah-like message – to turn people from disobedience to righteousness - from false worship to true worship. The result was a people ready for the first coming of Jesus (Luke 1:17). Thus when the Bible predicts that, just before the return of Jesus the second time, Elijah will come, it means that an Elijah-like message will be given in the same spirit and power of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the second coming of Jesus (Malachi 4:5,6) - an Elijah-like message that calls people to come away from false worship to genuine worship of God.

What is the Elijah-like message that is to be given before the return of Jesus Christ? The message is found in the book of Revelation. Woven throughout the pages of the Apocalypse of John, are allusions to a number of Old Testament stories such as: the snake and the woman (from Genesis 3); the Exodus of Israel from Egypt; the story of Babylon, and the story of Elijah and the “*Showdown of the gods.*”

The Elijah story emerges in Revelation 2:20 when a woman called Jezebel is mentioned in the fourth church, when the Christian church was going into a period of apostasy (a departure from truth) during the Dark Ages. Just as Jezebel led Israel astray by bringing false worship into Israel, so some in God’s church would lead the Christian church to depart from God when they mixed the things of God with the things of paganism. This was the very time in the Christian church when Sunday replaced the Bible Sabbath, sprinkling replaced Biblical baptism by immersion, the immortal soul replaced death as a sleep until Jesus returns.

The Elijah story is also seen in Revelation with the time period. Just as there was famine and drought in Israel for 3 ½ literal years, during which time God protected and provided for His prophet Elijah and the faithful people of Israel, so God predicted a period of 3½ prophetic years (1 time = 1 year; times = 2 years; ½ time = ½ year) or 1260 prophetic days, which represents 1260 literal years (1 day in Bible prophecy = 1 year of literal time – see Ezekiel 4:6), when His church would be in hiding, but during which time He would provide for and protect her, just as He did Elijah (Revelation 12:6,13,14). This period began in 538 AD when the Roman authorities gave the Christian church political as well as spiritual power. It ended exactly 1260 years later when Napoleon’s General, Berthier, took the Bishop of Rome a prisoner.

Just as with Elijah there was a “*Showdown of the gods*” on Mt Carmel after the 3½ years of persecution and hiding, as to which God should be worshiped as Israel’s God, so in Revelation 13, 14 there is a “*Showdown of the gods*” after the 3½ prophetic or 1260 literal years of the persecution and hiding of God’s Middle Age people. Just as the prophets of Baal sought to keep Israel in false worship, so the Dragon, the Sea Beast and the False Prophet (Land Beast) lead the entire world to worship Satan himself (Revelation 13:4,15-17). These powers through death threats, fear and deception, lead the entire world to worship or give their allegiance to Satan (Revelation 13:13-17).

Just as Elijah followed after the prophets of Baal with a simple prayer, calling Israel back to worship Jehovah (1 Kings 18:36, 37), so God sends three angels with three messages to call the world back to the worship of God as creator. Here is the end-time Elijah message for a planet in rebellion. The end-time message of Elijah is a message from the passionate heart of God just before the end of time, to call His children back to Himself.

The first angel proclaims that the time of judgment has begun (Revelation 14:7). Time is running out! Thus the urgency to proclaim the everlasting gospel globally. The gospel of Jesus is the way to be able to stand before God with confident hope in the judgment that commences before the return of Jesus (Revelation 14:7,7). But when the everlasting gospel is believed and accepted, it awakens three responses in the human heart: 1. A person fears or obeys God by keeping His commandments (Revelation 14:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Deuteronomy 6:2; John 14:15); 2. They glorify God by living totally for Him in every area of life including caring for their body as the temple of God that has been purchased with the blood of Jesus (Revelation 14:7; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31); 3. They worship God as creator, which occurs by keeping His seventh-day, Saturday, Sabbath as revealed in one of His eternal ten commandments (Revelation 14:7; Exodus 20:8-11).

The second angel proclaims that Babylon, which as we have seen in a previous program includes all systems of religion that are not following God's word, is fallen (Revelation 14:8). As time continues and demons take control of Babylon with all of its systems of non-Christian religion, the Church of Rome, and Protestantism, God calls His people not to seek to reform these systems, but to come out of Babylon, to come away from these fallen systems of religion, in order to avoid the 7 last plagues and eternal destruction (Revelation 18:1-4).

The third angel shouts with a loud voice not to receive the Mark of the Beast – not to continue worshiping on Sunday, where there is no rest, but by faith in Jesus, to keep God's commandments, which includes God's Sabbath, a symbol of our rest in Jesus (Revelation 14:9-12).

John then sees Jesus coming on the clouds of glory to gather His forever friends home, just as He did Elijah the prophet shortly after the showdown of the gods on Mount Carmel (Revelation 14:14-16). Tragically at the same time those who do not heed God's last warning messages of the three angels are destroyed, just as God had the prophets of Baal destroyed after the showdown of the gods on Mount Carmel (Revelation 14:17-20).

My friend, God is calling you to worship Him now, by keeping His 7th day Saturday Sabbath. He is calling you to leave religions in which teachings contrary to the Bible are taught and practiced. The only way to restore our broken down altar to God is to come to Jesus just as we are and to turn fully to Him – to repent. Only by trusting in Christ and His death can we have both forgiveness and power to do His will. Won't you show your love to Him right now by making a decision to follow Him fully in keeping the same Sabbath Jesus Himself gave and kept, and by coming out of religions that do not follow all the teachings of the Bible, and be part of His end-time remnant church of Bible prophecy (John 14:15)?