

# ELIJAH, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER

By

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

(I Kings 18)

WHEN Elijah left Zarephath, it is more than probable that his mind was utterly destitute of any fixed plan of action. He knew that he must show himself to Ahab, and that rain was not far away; for these were his definite marching orders: **“Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”** But more than that he knew not. There may have flitted before his spirit dim previsions of that sublime conflict on Carmel’s heights, but he knew nothing certainly; his one endeavor was to quiet his eager nature, like a weaned child, hushing it with the lullaby of an old refrain: **“My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him.”**

The plan of this great campaign for God against Baal, for truth against error, may have been revealed to Elijah on his journey from Zarephath to find Ahab, and at a sudden glance, as when a lightning-flash reveals to a benighted traveler the winding pathway he must follow through the vale beneath. But it is quite as likely that it was revealed in pieces, like the separate bits of a children’s puzzle - handed out, one by one, from the parent to the child, who might be confused to do with more than one at a time. This is so often God’s way; and they who trust Him utterly are quite pleased to have it so. There is even a novelty and beauty in life, when every step is unforeseen and unexpected, and opens up new vistas of loveliness in God’s management and in Himself.

If we seek to think ourselves into Elijah’s attitude of heart and mind, as he left the shelter of Zarephath, and began to pass through the incidents that culminated in Carmel, it seems to have been three-fold. And surely it is of surpassing interest to learn how such a man felt as he approached the sublime crisis of his life.

#### **I. HE WAS FILLED WITH A CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**

**“Let it be known that Thou art God in Israel.”**

This prayer is the key to his heart. He neither knew nor cared to know what would become of himself; but his soul was on fire with a holy jealousy for the glory of God.

- He could not bear to think of those wrecked altars or martyred prophets.
- He could not bear to think how the Land of Promise was groaning beneath the obscene and deadly rites of Phoenician idolatry.
- He could not bear to think that his people were beginning to imagine that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel had abdicated in favor of these false deities brought newly in.

And when he was compelled to face these things, his spirit was stirred to its depths with indignation and sorrow.

Well would it be if each one of us was similarly inspired! We are very eager for the success of our work, our church, our group. If these thrive, we are satisfied; if these languish, we are depressed. We are wholly occupied with the interests of our own tiny pools, oblivious of the great sea of Divine glory lying nearby, in perpetual sunshine. Is it wonderful that we have so small a measure of success?

God will not give His glory to another, nor His praise to the graven images of our own conceit. But in this, also, God is willing to lift our daily experience to the level of our loftiest ideals. Only trust Him to do it; ask and expect Him to fill you with the fire of that zeal which burned in the heart of Elijah, consuming all that was base, corrupt, and selfish, and making the whole man a fit agent for God. This was no indigenous growth. It was not more natural to him than it is to any one of us. It was simply one of the fruits of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, who is equally promised to the most ignoble nature.

## **II. HE WAS PROFOUNDLY CONVINCED THAT HE WAS ONLY A SERVANT**

**“Let it be known that Thou art God in Israel; and that I am Thy servant.”**

It was not for the slave in olden times to originate, or scheme, or plan; but to be pliant to the least expression of the master’s will to be a tool in his hand, a chess-piece on the board for him to move just where he willed. And this was the attitude of Elijah’s spirit - surrendered, yielded, emptied; plastic to the hands that reach down out of heaven molding men.

This attitude is the true one for us all. Are we not too fond of doing things for God, instead of letting God do what He chooses through us? We say, “We will go yonder; we will do this and that; we will work for God thus.”

We do not consider that we should first inquire if this were God’s will for us. We do not recognize His absolute ownership. We often miss doing what He sorely wants to do, because we insist on carrying out some little whim of our own. This is the blight on much of the activity of Christian people at the present time. They are not satisfied to be as the Apostle Paul was, **“the servant of Jesus Christ”** (Romans 1:1).

## **III. ELIJAH WAS EAGERLY DESIROUS TO KNOW AND WORK OUT GOD’S PLAN**

**“Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel; and that I am Thy servant; and that I have done all these things according to Thy word.”**

When once a man feels that he is working out God's plan, and that God is working out His plan through him, he is invincible.

Men, circumstances, opposition, are of no more account than the chaff of the autumn threshings. God's plan is His purpose; and God's purpose shall be accomplished, though earth and heaven pass away. And this was doubtless one element in Elijah's splendid strength.

This question as to our relation to God's plan is most important; because the power and blessing of God are only to be enjoyed in all their fullness by those who are where He would have them be. God had the plan of the desert wanderings in His thought long before Israel left Egypt; and He worked out that plan by the movements of the cloud over the desert sands. The manna fell on any given morning only where the cloud was brooding, shielding the host by its fleecy fold. To get the manna and the shade, the blood-redeemed must be just where God's plan required them to be.

This is a parable of our lives. Would we have Divine supplies? We must keep step with the Divine plan. The fire burns only when we erect the altar according to God's word. We must not be disobedient to a heavenly vision. We must not spend our years in day-dreams, nor in seeking comfort; but must be incessant in uttering the cry, "**What wilt Thou have me to do?**"

There are many ways of learning God's plan. Sometimes it is revealed in circumstances - not always pleasant, but ever acceptable, because revealing our Father's will. No circumstance happens outside His permission; and therefore each is a King's messenger bearing His message, though we are sometimes puzzled to decipher it. Sometimes God's plan is revealed by strong impressions of duty, which increase in proportion as they are prayed over, and are tested by the Word of God.

There are many voices by which God can speak His will to the truly surrendered spirit. If there is any confusion as to what it is, it is due to one of these two causes: either the will is not fully yielded to do God's will so soon as known, but there is some film between the two, preventing the entire permeation of the human by the Divine; or the time of perfect knowledge has not arrived, and we must be content quietly to wait for the salvation of God.

It is a true rule for us all, to do nothing so long as we are in any uncertainty; but to examine ourselves, and to be ready to act so soon as we know. We may not infrequently have the experience of the Apostle Peter repeated in our own: "**While Peter doubted in himself what this vision, which he had seen, should mean, behold, the men sent from Cornelius stood before the gate**" (Acts 10:17). The knocking of three men at a gate may sometimes indicate God's plan; or a dream from across the sea; or the glimpse of a weary face, just a little more weary than others around (Acts 16:9, 10; John 5:6, 7).

The plan, as Elijah unfolded it to Ahab, was eminently adapted to the circumstances of the case. All Israel was to be gathered by royal summons to Carmel, which reared itself above the plain of Esdraelon, a noble site for a national meeting-ground. Special care was to be taken to secure the presence of the representatives of the systems that had dared to rival the worship of the Lord:

**“The prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the Asherah four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table.”**

A test was then to be imposed on these rival systems, which the adherents of Baal could not possibly refuse; for he was the Sun-god, and this was a trial by fire.

Elijah knew that the altar of Baal would remain smokeless. He was equally sure that the Lord would answer his faith by fire, as He had done again and again in the glorious past. He felt convinced also that the people, unable to escape the evidence of their senses, would forever disavow the accursed systems of Phoenicia, and would return once more to the worship of the God of their fathers.

It is probable that, in the case of Ahab, only so much of this plan was disclosed as was necessary to secure the gathering of the people. To tell him too much would be to invite criticism, and perhaps to arouse opposition. It is not likely that he would have been so pliant, unless allured by the bait of rain.

**“So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel.”**

We do not know how this was done; but doubtless the royal word would be passed through the country by a system of messengers, like those which once gave warning of the peril of Jabesh-Gilead; or, in later times, carried through the Highlands the fiery cross. But in any case this summoning of the people must have taken a few days. And it is by that interval of waiting that we are for a moment arrested. It was like the sultry hush which precedes the breaking of a tropic thunder-storm; or the momentary pause before long lines of armed men are launched at each other in the shock of battle.

Where and how did Elijah spend that interval? We are told that **“he came unto all the people,”** when they were finally assembled on the appointed day. We may not press the word; but does it not suggest that he came from the contrary direction to that from which the people gathered? And if the people came from the whole circumference of the land, may he not have come from some ancient cave of Carmel’s heights, just where the long range of hills drops suddenly down in sheer precipices on the sea?

In my opinion, Elijah spent those memorable days of waiting on Carmel itself; sheltering himself and the lad in some wild cave at night, and by day going carefully over the scene of the approaching conflict. How mournfully would he bend over the stones of that altar, which was broken down! - broken down not by the wild weather, or the devastating hand of time; but by the wicked behest of Jezebel (I Kings 18:32). How eagerly would he search out the original twelve stones, strewn recklessly afar, and covered by wild undergrowth. He would need them soon! How constantly would he stay himself upon his God, and pour out litanies of supplication for the people, and gird himself for the coming conflict by effectual, fervent prayer.

Would he not learn the way down to Kishon's brook beneath, and visit the perennial spring, from which he would fill the barrels again and yet again with water?

We sometimes seem to think that that answer of fire was probably so much the result of God's determination as to have been largely independent of any special exercise of the prophet's faith. We suppose that more faith and prayer were needed to bring the rain than to bring the leaping, consuming flame.

We consider that the one needed the intense sevenfold prayer; whilst the other needed only the few sentences spoken in the audience of the amazed people, at the moment of sacrifice. But this is a very superficial reading of the story; and it is not in harmony with the general dealings of God. **"For all these things I will be inquired of."**

As much fervent, believing prayer was needed for the fire as for the rain; and the answer by fire would never have come that day, if the previous days had not been spent in the presence-chamber of God. The prayer during ten days of waiting, in the upper room, must precede the descent of the Holy Ghost, as a baptism of fire, on the Day of Pentecost.

It is a sublime spectacle - this yielded, surrendered man, awaiting on Carmel, in steadfast faith, the gathering of the people, and the unfolding of the purpose of God. He had no fear about the issue; and as the days rolled by, his soul rose in higher and ever higher joy. He expected soon to see a nation at the feet of God.

And he was all this, not because he was of a different make to ourselves; but because he had got into the blessed habit of dealing with God at first hand, as a Living Reality, in whose presence it was his privilege and glory always to stand.

**~ end of chapter 7 ~**

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