



1 Kings 18:20–40: Silence

(v 21) Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.

(vv 25, 26) Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” / So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered.

(vv 37, 38) “Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” / Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

Silence.

It can have great meaning beyond the mere absence of sound. It can express much more than mere words can convey: it can reveal the inner drama, the crucial core struggle occurring in any situation.

There was, for example, the awkward silence of the Israelites when Elijah hit them with the million-dollar question: Who do you serve, who do you believe in? We can imagine the reddened cheeks, the quick coughs, the self-conscious scratching of necks as they revealed without words their teeter-totter religion of convenience – whichever god gets me what I want, that’s who I trust in.

There was the absurd silence of a non-existent deity in response to the frantic ravings of the followers of Baal. After their pathetic display of dance and self-mutilation ceased, it immediately became clear that they might as well have been calling on Puff the Magic Dragon, for all the good it did them. Whatever the idol, it cannot in truth provide needed answers.

Then, finally, the awesome silence of God. After Elijah’s simple prayer, God didn’t need to thunder from the heavens or use Hollywood-style surround sound to evoke oohs and aahs. Instead, He sent a single firey bolt to decisively prove He is Who He is – the very God of all existence. His succinct display of raw power and confirmation of His word through Elijah accomplished far more than any smoke and mirror laser show complete with impressive words and inspiring music.

God does not need to impress us. He chooses to reach out to us in love to call us back to Him, which was the real purpose of the struggle on Carmel: “...so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again (v. 37).” God wants His people to trust in Him, and He wants our fallen world to turn back to Him. He is always working; can we trust Him as He works in silence?