



1 Kings 18:41–46: Contrast

*(vv. 41-42) ⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.”
⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.*

(vv. 45-46) ⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

The smoke has cleared from the fire of the Lord striking Elijah’s makeshift altar and drenched offering, the dust from the exiting crowd has settled. Now only two remain to complete the showdown for Israel’s devotion: Ahab and Elijah.

These two are a study in contrast. Ahab with his expensive clothes, noble crown, and fancy chariot, is supposedly in charge. Yet it is the rough-hewn character from the wrong side of the Jordan river who calls the plays. In the power vacuum following the deposing of Baal and the hasty exit of the imaginary deity’s humiliated representatives, someone needs to stand and point the way forward for the nation. Surprisingly, Ahab is dismissed to officiate at the celebratory banquet. Elijah, meanwhile, heads back up the mountain, his servant sent to watch the sea for a change in the weather.

While Ahab fills himself with fine food and samples the local vintages, Elijah is alone on the top of Carmel. Faith alone keeps him on his knees, his face deeply bowed to the ground. He waits for what may have seemed an eternity, sending his servant back and back again to get him a weather report. His servant trudges up and down six times with the same forecast: Sunny skies and beautiful weather at the beach. The seventh time, the unnamed servant comes back, saying the only change is a fist-sized cloud rising from the sea.

Meanwhile, the festivities at the bottom of the hill have come to a close. The guests, heavy with food and drink, have tottered unsteadily away, leaving Ahab on his cushion, likely wishing for an antacid. Suddenly, the servant of the man of God comes with an urgent message: Hitch up your chariot and put it into overdrive, or you’ll be stopped by the rain. Through bleary eyes, Ahab notices the skies getting dark, and takes the prophet’s advice, racing away as fast as his thoroughbreds can take him.

Elijah, meanwhile, is given a different mode of transportation. Seized by God’s power, he is supernaturally enabled to outpace Ahab’s sports chariot the nearly thirty miles to Jezreel on his sandaled feet alone.

The real contrast here, however, is not in feasting or racing, but in where each man had placed his faith. Ahab symbolizes his nation, shifting their faith between God and stone idols as circumstances changed. An unwilling attendant at the challenge between Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Carmel, he wavers along with the rest of the crowd as the event unfolds. Elijah, on the other hand, trusts in the Lord even when the circumstances are very unfavorable for doing so. He acts out in faith what the Lord has told him to do, even when all the evidence seems to point in the other direction.

Are we walking in contrast to the world, following our Lord? Or do we waver with the rest of the crowd?