

# IT'S A MIRACLE

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My grandparents used to have an expression to describe somebody who is extremely rich. It was a really colorful expression. They used to describe such a very wealthy person by saying that, “***They had enough money to burn a wet mule?***” Have you ever heard that before? Now when I was little, I could certainly visualize that, but still I couldn’t quite understand why anyone would want to burn a wet mule. And I can remember hoping that it was a dead wet mule because I really didn’t think that it would be right to burn one alive. Plus, being the little capitalist that I was—I really couldn’t see the point in burning all of that money. And then again, I began to wonder if it was even possible—could you really generate enough heat to burn a thoroughly soaked mule? This morning, as we continue along with Elijah on his journey, we can clearly see that, yes—you can burn things like that, even things much wetter than a soaked mule—if God is on your side.

Now, I’m not going to read the entire passage of this part of Elijah’s story because it is fairly long. So, I am going to summarize what you can read in detail from 1 Kings 18:1-29. This is what happened in those verses. Despite the fact that King Ahab is looking high and low to find Elijah and kill him, God tells Elijah to come out of hiding and go right on up and present himself face to face to Ahab. And so Elijah does this, and not only that but he challenges Ahab to a contest that will put his so-called prophets of Baal to the test. He tells Ahab to get 450 of these Baal prophets together and have them set up two altars and to bring plenty of firewood with them. Now, Elijah didn’t tell Ahab anything about bringing any wet mules along, but he did tell him to make sure that these prophets of Baal showed up with two bulls. And the challenge was this: The Baal prophets would call upon Baal, the god of thunderbolts and storms, to send down a bolt of lightning and set the bull on fire that was placed on Baal’s altar. If Baal’s specialty was storms and lightning, then this shouldn’t be hard for him at all. And then, after Baal had been given his opportunity, Elijah would call upon the God of Israel to do the same thing—and everybody would see that the God of Israel was the real thing, and Baal was no more than a stuffed toy idol.

And so that’s what they did—they all met Elijah there on Mt. Carmel in the presence of all the people—who apparently came to cheer on the Baal prophets as if they were at a football game. But, before they started this contest, Elijah quieted the crowd with one simple question. He looked over the people and asked them boldly: “*How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!*” 1 Kings 18:21 (NLT2) But, you could have heard a pin drop because the people didn’t say a word, and they became completely quiet. And so

Elijah, being a perfect gentleman and just to be completely fair, allowed the prophets of Baal to go first. They danced and hooped and hollowed summoning Baal to send lightning down and ignite the dried fire wood on the altar upon which their sacrificed bull now lay. But, nothing happened. And so, to show their earnestness and determination, some of the Baal prophets starting cutting themselves with knives in a futile attempt to get Baal's attention. The hours passed, and the Baal prophets became bloody from their cuts—but, still no response came from Baal.

Well, after observing their wasted efforts for so long, I suppose Elijah just couldn't resist making a few choice comments—mostly for the benefit of the crowd that was now beginning to wonder about Baal's abilities. Now, I have to warn you—Elijah got so fed up with these Baal prophets that some of his comments were just a bit crude. For in 1 Kings 18:27, it tells us: "About noontime, Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder than that," he scoffed, "to catch the attention of your god! Perhaps he is talking to someone, or is out sitting on the toilet [see, I told you he could be crude], or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!" (TLB) And this just made those Baal prophets dance and prance and yell all the more. But, still nothing happened. So, finally Elijah told them that they had had enough time. Now, he was going to show them what the true God could do. And let me tell you, it was a lot harder than burning a wet mule—because Elijah made sure that the bull on his altar was super-saturated with water.

And so, Elijah called all the people over to God's altar and this is what the Scriptures tell us happened: <sup>31</sup> He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, <sup>32</sup> and used the stones to rebuild the Lord's altar. Then he dug a trench about three feet wide around the altar. <sup>33</sup> He piled wood upon the altar and cut the young bull into pieces and laid the pieces on the wood. [You might think that the ground here in Louisa is wet after on the rain that we've had but this is nothing compared to the ground around Elijah's altar. Listen to what Elijah told them. He said:] "Fill four barrels with water and pour the water over the carcass and the wood." After they had done this he said, <sup>34</sup> "Do it again." And they did. "Now, do it once more!" And they did; <sup>35</sup> and the water ran off the altar and filled the trench. <sup>36</sup> At the customary time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, prove today that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant; prove that I have done all this at your command. <sup>37</sup> O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." <sup>38</sup> Then, suddenly, fire flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, the dust, and even evaporated all the water in the ditch! <sup>39</sup> And when the people saw it, they fell to their faces upon the ground shouting, "Jehovah is God! Jehovah is God!" 1 Kings 18:31-39 (TLB)

You know, it took a lot of faith to do what Elijah did. He stood defiantly for the Lord, right there in the presence of a king who wanted to kill him, and among 450 prophets of Baal who would have loved to put Elijah on their altar and light him up. And God, in turn, stood firmly behind Elijah and vindicated his great faith. Now some might say that this is just an Old Testament story. They might contend that things like that don't happen in our modern world today. They might say that, but nothing could be farther from the truth. A person's faithfulness in God is rewarded just as much today as it has ever been rewarded in the past. Why?—because God's Word assures us of that. God is always faithful to His people—whether during the time of Elijah or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moses declared: “Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unflinching love on those who love him and obey his commands.” Deuteronomy 7:9 (NLT2) The Psalmist followed this up by saying: “Your faithfulness extends to every generation, as enduring as the earth you created.” Psalm 119:90 (NLT2) So for those who claim that it would be impossible for a bolt of lightning to come down out of the clouds right on Elijah's cue, and completely consume that water-soaked sacrificial bull—well, Jesus has an answer for them. Jesus assures us that “with God all things are possible.” Matthew 19:26 (NIV)

It's amazing to me how many of these miracles happen even today, but few people notice. And one of the reasons that so few notice is that the news media seems content not to report on them. Quite frankly, when I heard that the State of Alabama had a referendum on its ballot during the recent mid-term elections to amend its constitution, I was surprised. And the reason that I was so surprised was that this referendum was to decide whether or not the Ten Commandments could to be displayed on public property. I thought to myself that it would take a miracle—divine intervention—for such an amendment to pass. And when the mid-term elections were over and I didn't hear any more about it, I assumed that the referendum had failed. Certainly something as big as that would have made headlines if the people of an entire state had endorsed the Ten Commandments—or, at least, that is what I thought. But it wasn't until I happened upon a news article by the *Christian Broadcasting Network* that I found out what had occurred. As it turns out, 72% of voters of Alabama approved this constitutional amendment and now public schools and local governments in Alabama can lawfully display the Ten Commandments on their properties. The evangelist, Franklin Graham, applauded the people of Alabama and pointed out that: “This is a great example of what a difference your vote can make. . . In a time when secularism is attempting to remove God from everything in the public realm, this is major. As Christians we need to keep praying, work boldly, and stand firmly on the Solid Rock. The Ten Commandments define God's laws, and were the foundation of man's laws. I hope more states will

follow Alabama's example!"<sup>1</sup> I couldn't agree more. (Now, when I play Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," on my car stereo, it will have a whole new meaning.)

Of course, it didn't take long before an atheist group to respond to this by suggesting that: "any public school that puts up a Ten Commandments monument and excludes . . . a Satanic one is . . . violating the First Amendment's Establishment Clause [of the U. S. Constitution]."<sup>2</sup> Don't be dismayed—that atheist legal assessment is on no better footing than the prophets of Baal were.

In any event, I think that it took a lot of courage and a great deal of faith for Christians in Alabama to do what was necessary to pass such a constitutional amendment—because today there are just so many people, including prominent politicians, members of the media and a host of atheist organizations, who scoff at anything Christian. And because of that, we feel like we are outnumbered in this country. We feel like the odds are against us. But, Elijah was outnumbered too—he was outnumbered 450 to 1 in this contest with the prophets of Baal. But the thing is, the One who was on Elijah's side made all of the difference—**because God was on His side**. And when we are faithful to Him, God is on our side as well, and that makes all of the difference in the world. The Psalmist understood this when he said: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Psalm 118:6 (AMP) And Paul echoed this same thought when he wrote: <sup>31</sup> "If God is on our side, who can ever be against us?" Romans 8:31 (TLB)

And don't think that God's miracles are only manifested in votes cast in constitutional referendums, as in Alabama. No, God does what might seem like impossible things all the time. A news story came out last week that reminds us of this biblical truth. Of course, again, it was reported on the Christian Broadcasting Network—not by the main stream news media. This news story is about a man named Paul Wood who is a resident of Lodi, California. For several months, Paul was plagued with severe headaches and extreme dizziness. Eventually, he was diagnosed by both a neurosurgeon and radiologist as having a malignant brain tumor. So, Paul acted prudently. He took his doctors' advice and scheduled the necessary brain surgery. But, Paul did something else that was even more prudent. **He turned to God in prayer.** (Note that that is exactly what Elijah did as recited in verse 36 of our reading.) Not only that, but Paul Wood had as many of his Christian friends as possible to pray for him as well. They, in turn, asked their friends to pray to God for His healing. And boy did they become prayer warriors for him. Paul put it this way: "My phone [was] blowing up, my Facebook [was] prayer after prayer, all over California." Then a miracle happened and God sent a lightning bolt to Paul—not a visible one like Elijah witnessed, but one that was just as effective. You see, the day before Paul was scheduled undergo surgery, his doctors did a pre-operative scan. But, look as they may, they just couldn't find any

evidence of the tumor. It was completely gone. It was as if it had evaporated just like all that water that soaked Elijah's sacrificial bull. Dr. Richard Yee, Paul's neurosurgeon, could offer no explanation whatsoever. The doctor simply admitted: "We do tests and we have medical technology and we try to come up with some conclusion . . . sometimes things happen that we can't explain." But, Paul had an explanation. In fact, he didn't have any question about: "It's a miracle," he said, "and that is the way God planned it." Paul's pastor, Jason McEachron," concurred and added: "[Paul] just kept saying, 'no matter what happens to me, I'm going to be okay. I trust God.'" The pastor went on to say, "Paul is overjoyed that he's been given a second chance at life and wants the opportunity to tell others about the hope that they too can have simply by putting their faith in Jesus Christ—and in turning to Him in prayer."<sup>3</sup>

And maybe we are beginning to see a second chance for our nation as well. But, it's a second chance that depends upon our collective answer to that same question that Elijah put to the people as they had gathered there on Mt. Carmel. It's a question that God asks of America today: "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" 1 Kings 18:21 (NLT2) Now, the vote by the people of Alabama is encouraging. Perhaps, it is a sign that even in this country—despite years of moral regression—we may still be able to reclaim the Christian initiative and again stand strong as a Christian nation. Maybe we can even start to replant the Ten Commandments, crowned with the Good News of Jesus Christ, once again in the public realm throughout our nation. Of course, Alabama is only one of 50 states. Turning the other 49—well that would take a miracle—wouldn't it? But, all it takes is God on our side. All it takes is trust and faith in Him, coupled with the united prayers of Christians throughout this nation, for that miracle to produce a reality. And in that reality, maybe we, as God's people, can turn the tide and influence the spiritual direction of our country—turn it away from all those secular Baals that our people have bowed down to for so long—those Baals who are no more able to meet their true needs than the 450 phonies that Elijah contended with all those many years ago.

Economically, our people are the richest in the world. Wouldn't be a miracle if the American people became so rich that we all could burn some wet mules (or even a bull or two)?—not rich economically in the terms of wealth—but, rich spiritually in terms of our relationship with God. Now, I have to admit—that that would be a miracle indeed. But, as God's Word says: Nothing is impossible with Him on our side. It doesn't matter if the odds are 450 to 1, or 450 billion to 1. We'll always be on the winning side if we truly serve Him, and trust in His goodness.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
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<sup>1</sup> Emily Jones, "'Way to Go Alabama!' Franklin Graham Praises Alabama for Voting to Display Ten Commandments in Schools," November 9, 2018, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews>.

<sup>2</sup> Hemant Mehta, "Christian Lawyer Says Alabama's Ten Commandments Ballot Initiative Will Backfire," <https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com> 11/10/ 18.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Warren, "'It's a Miracle and That is the Way God Planned It': Doctors Baffled After Man's Brain Tumor Disappears," 11-10-2018, CBNNEWS.COM.