

THEATRICAL RELIGION



Almost everyone has read about a particular spectacle of religious showmanship that has been circulated throughout the world. It seems that there was this bazaar religious reality show sometime in the past where there were several preachers jumping around an altar. The preachers then started to jump up and down like a troop of drunken monkeys on steroids. This carried for almost an entire day. They were screaming at the top of their voices, which screaming eventually made all of them so hoarse that they could no longer speak. They then resorted to cutting themselves with knives in order to excite an entranced audience of onlookers to join in.

The preachers were so intense in their outlandish theatrics that blood gushed from their severed veins and was strewn over the audience, many of whom were likewise stirred into an hypnotic frenzy of uncontrollable hysteria. It was a display of religious nonsense to the extreme. Some in the audience were so uncontrollably moved that they fell to the ground, rolling in every contorted way possible. Some in the audience were likewise crying out at the top of their voices. Others just fell down as stunned mummies because of what they saw in the behavior of the preachers dancing on stage around the altar. Those who had fallen down just laid there emotionally paralyzed in the exhaustion of a semiconscious stupor.

We are sure you did not miss this hysterical display of reality

religiosity that has gone viral throughout the world. It was a typical demonstration of religious sensationalism that is characteristic with many religious groups today.

A. The mocking preacher:

If you read carefully this theatrical picture of a religious extravaganza in **1 Kings 18:17-40**—maybe somewhat embellished by our imagination of the account—you will notice that there was this one preacher who was standing off to the side by himself from the enraptured crowd. He was there, calmly watching the outrageous behavior of the entire spectacle. He simply remained unmoved by all the horrific experiential display of preachers out of control of themselves who were emotionality in a fit of hysteria.

After observing this psychotic and misguided religiosity for some time, you would not believe what the observing preacher did. **He began to mock the theatrical preachers.** He mocked them by chiding that they should appeal more intensely to their god, **which god they had created after their own misguided imagination:** *“Cry aloud,”* he mockingly chided them, *“for he is a god. Either he is meditating, or he is busy, or maybe he is on some journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened”* (1 Kg 18:27).

People who are ignorant of the God of the Bible will create a god in their minds that they believe seeks hysterical and out-of-control worship.

B. The real thing:

It is interesting that this event has been circulated throughout the world for years in the Bible. Unfortunately, it is seldom read by those who seek to lose themselves in their own vain worship (See Mk 7:1-9). We live in a religious world today

where such scenes, as was played out in 1 Kings 18, are broadcast around the world on religious television. One can actually – we refuse to – bring such religious nonsense into his or her own home by turning to those religious channels that broadcast “theatrical religion.”

1 Kings 18 is an ancient record that reveals how long experiential religion has been with us. As then, so also now, theatrical religiosity is an obsession of misguided religionists who believe that their release from their struggles in life is a Sunday morning outburst of emotional hysteria. But this is an obsessive behavior wherein some seek to move into self-sanctifying religiosity.

Such people often justify their senseless behavior by plagiarized the word “worship” in the Bible. They consider their out-of-control assemblies to be worship, though cults do the same. In their efforts to validate their hysterical “worship” they have created a god after their own experiences. They have imagined this god in their minds to sit and witness their obnoxious theatrical performances and listen to their ear-splitting noise. But is this the God who would say to His people, *“The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him”* (Hk 2:20).

If we are guilty of creating this idol god whom we would self-righteously worship, and whom we suppose would accept as worship religious theatrics, then we have deceived ourselves. Some folks sometimes produce the most exotic and spiritually toxic assemblies by which they reassure themselves that such experiential events must exist every Sunday morning when they come together in order to “awaken their idol god from his sleep,” or call him back into their lives from a “journey” on which he may have gone. Their assemblies, however, qualify as the meeting of a cult, regardless of how many times they

cry out, “Jesus, Jesus.”

Some now believe that the more noise they can amplify in an assembly, the more rabid they stir the attendees into a frenzy. In this way, they often dupe themselves into believing that their hysterical Sunday extravaganza will call their idol god up from the quietness of his sleep in order to give attention to their chaotic assembly. This was what the Baal prophets of Elijah’s day believed, and subsequently behaved accordingly when Elijah challenged them to an altar contest.

So we, too, combine the deafening noise of a rock concert, plus the preachers’ rhythmical cheerleading cries, and then suppose that we have awakened our god out of his sleep in order to administer a spiritual placebo to ourselves that will carry us through until the next Sunday extravaganza. It will be then that we will again proceed through the same theatrical ritual of jumping up and down around a vainly offered sacrifice while severing our emotional veins with unspiritual knives. The Baal prophets were masters at producing an emotional frenzy among themselves and the people.

If we create in our minds a god after our own out-of-control emotional behavior, then we will behave in our worship according to what we believe this god desires.

C. A true prophet of God:

So some might think that we are being somewhat over critical of the Baal prophets in this matter. Some may think that we are mocking when we chide these theatrical prophets with the words, “*Cry aloud, for you suppose he is a god! Maybe your god is asleep! Maybe he is on a journey!*” You are exactly right. **That is precisely what Elijah did.**

We stand with Elijah, the prophet of God, the preacher who

mocked the 450 Baal preachers in 1 Kings 18 who had lost their dignity before an audience of people whom they had led into the captivity of uncontrolled religious theatrics. These prophets had sacrificed the word of God for an experience of religious theatrics by which they thought they could conjure up the dead god they had created in their own minds. They presumed that their emotional hysteria on the stage of the altar would lead the people to believe in the nonsense of their misguided religiosity that was sterile of any knowledge of the one true and living God.

The biblical record of this theatrical spectacle proves that nothing has changed among some religionists since the day Elijah mocked the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel almost three thousand years ago. There are still today those who would woo us into thinking that they speak the truth simply because they can hysterically perform religious theatrics before a crowd of people. But we will not be deceived. We will not become a cult of religionists.

Those preachers who would not stand with Elijah and mock hysterical preachers who seek to emotionally deceive the people, are themselves condoning such misguided religiosity.

D. Heed the warnings:

The word of God is filled with warnings to which we should give earnest heed. Repeating these warnings on a regular basis would be good for us in these times when there are so many theatrical religions throughout the world that have led millions into a world of deception:

*For the time will come when **they will not endure sound teaching**. But to suit their own itching ears, **they will surround themselves with teachers** who will agree with their own [theatrical] desires. And **they will turn away** their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4).*

The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all deceiving power and signs and wonders, and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved (2 Th 2:9,10).

If we behave in our assemblies as a cult of theatrical cultists, then we are a cult.

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. Why did Elijah mock the prophets of Baal in their hysterical extravaganza of making a sacrifice to Baal?
2. What lessons can be learned from what Elijah commanded to do with the Baal prophets?
3. Why do idol gods behave as their creators think they should?
4. Why can God hear the still small voice of a whispered prayer?
5. Why was Elijah's mocking of the behavior of the Baal prophets justified?

For continued research on this subject,
download Book 44, *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*
from the *Biblical Research Library* at:
www.africainternational.org

ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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