

1 Kings Chapter 18 Continued

1 Kings 18:20 "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel."

Ahab sent word by messengers, requiring their attendance at Mount Carmel at such a time, at least their chief and principal men.

"And gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel": The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, but not the four hundred prophets of the groves; for of them we have no account afterwards, only of the former. It may be they were not at the command of Ahab, only of Jezebel, at whose table they ate, who would not suffer them to go.

In the last lesson, Elijah told Ahab to gather all the people and the prophets of Baal, and also the prophets of the groves to Mount Carmel. Ahab wants to get this drought stopped, so he had done as Elijah asked.

1 Kings 18:21 "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD [be] God, follow him: but if Baal, [then] follow him. And the people answered him not a word."

Elijah's call to choose sides rings into our hearts today. No place in the Word of God is there room for a middle-of-the-road position (Matt. 6:24).

"Halt ye between two opinions": Literally "limp along on or between two twigs." Israel had not totally rejected the Lord, but was seeking to combine worship of Him with the worship of Baal. The issue posed by Elijah was that Israel had to choose who was God, the Lord or Baal, and then serve God wholeheartedly. Rather than decide by his message, Elijah sought a visible sign for heaven.

This meeting on Mount Carmel is to decide once and for all, who is God. Elijah knows that many of them are still worshipping the LORD. Some are worshipping Baal. Others cannot make up their minds who they should worship. We see a very strange gathering here. The prophets of Baal and Ahab are on one side, and Elijah is on the other side. He says, "make up your mind". You cannot believe in both at the same time. Elijah is telling them if they are convinced after this confrontation on the mount, that God is God, worship Him, and no other. If they decide that Baal is god, then worship him. The people did not answer because their conscience was hurting them.

1 Kings 18:22 "Then said Elijah unto the people, I, [even] I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets [are] four hundred and fifty men."

At least as he thought, all the rest being slain, as he supposed; however, there were none present but himself.

"But Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men": Which were very great odds he had to contend with.

This does not mean that the 100 prophets Obadiah had hidden were dead. It just means they were not at Mount Carmel. Elijah alone stood for the One True God on Mount Carmel. The 450 prophets of Baal would make it more dramatic when God proves Himself here.

1 Kings 18:23 "Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay [it] on wood, and put no fire [under]: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay [it] on wood, and put no fire [under]:"

Who, being so many, were better able to be at the expense of them, and having the king on their party too. Though perhaps no more is meant than that two bullocks should be brought thither, and presented before them.

"And let them choose one bullock for themselves": Which of the two they would, if they thought one was any ways preferable to the other, it was at their option to take it.

"And cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood": As sacrifices usually were.

"And put no fire under": Which was accustomed to be done for burnt offerings, as this was designed to be.

"And I will dress the other bullock": By slaying and cutting it in pieces.

"And lay it on wood": As for a burnt offering.

"And put no fire under": To consume it.

Each of these bullocks was to be offered to their god. Elijah would offer one to the True God, and they would offer theirs to Baal. The offerings were the same, just dedicated differently. Each offering must be handled identically for this to be a true test.

1 Kings 18:24 "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

"The God that answereth by fire": Since Baal's followers believed that he controlled the thunder, lightning, and storms, and the Lord's followers declared the same (Psalms 18:14; 29:3-9; 104:3), this would prove to be a fair test to show who was God.

This challenge is fair. No one can say that this is not a test of who the true God is. All are in agreement, that this should settle the question. There will be no doubt left.

1 Kings 18:25 "And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress [it] first; for ye [are] many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire [under]."

Who agreed to this proposal, though not expressed; or they signified it by their silence. Ben Gersom thinks they agreed to it, because that, according to their belief, Baal was Mars, and in the sign of Aries, one of the fiery planets, and therefore fancied he could send down fire on their sacrifice. But Abarbinel is of opinion that it was the sun they worshipped, under the name of Baal, the great luminary which presides over the element of fire, and therefore had power to cause it to descend. And if not, they agreed to it, he thinks, for three reasons. One was necessity, they could not refuse, after the people had approved of it, lest they should rise upon them, and stone them. Another was that Elijah proposed to offer without the temple, contrary to the law of his God, and therefore concluded he would not answer him by fire, and so they should be upon a par with him. And the third was that they thought they should offer their bullocks together, so that, if fire descended, it would come upon them both, and then the dispute would be, whether his God, or their god, sent it. And so, no proof could be made who was God, nor the matter in controversy decided.

"Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first": For ye are many; therefore, in civility to them gave the choice of the bullock and the altar first, he being one and they many.

"And call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under": Under the wood on which was the sacrifice cut in pieces; and when they had so done, then they were to call on their gods to cause fire to descend upon it.

He gives them every advantage. The more lee-way he gives them the greater the victory will be for God. The one thing they are not to do is put any fire under the offering. The fact that they go first is to show that Baal is truly a nothing. He will be defamed before all of his prophets this day.

Verses 26-29: If anyone could answer by fire, it should have been Baal, the storm god. His worshippers believed that he controlled lightning. "He is busy" was a euphemism for going to the restroom. According to their customs of Baal worship, the dancing, shouting, and self-mutilation were meant to arouse Baal from death, from sleep or call him back from a journey.

1 Kings 18:26 "And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed [it], and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But [there was] no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made."

By such of them as made the choice.

"And they dressed it": Slew it, and cut it in pieces, and laid it on the wood, but put no fire under it.

"And called on the name of Baal, from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us": And send fire down on the sacrifice. And if the sun was their Baal, they might hope, as the heat he gradually diffused was at its height at noon, that some flashes of fire would proceed from it to consume their sacrifice. But after, their hope was turned into despair, they became and acted like madmen.

"But there was no voice, nor any that answered": By word, or by sending down fire as they desired.

"And they leapt upon the altar which was made": Not by Elijah, but by themselves, either now or heretofore, and where they had formerly sacrificed. And they danced about it, and leaped on it, either according to a custom used by them; such as the Salii, the priests of Mars used, so called from their leaping, because they did their sacred things leaping, and went about their altars capering and leaping. Or rather they were mad on it, as the Targum renders it, and acted like madmen, as if they were agitated by a prophetic fury and frenzy.

The more they cried out to Baal, the quieter it got. They were so disappointed that Baal did not answer them that they began to leap on the altar.

1 Kings 18:27 "And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he [is] a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, [or] peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked."

“Mocked”: The myths surrounding Baal portrayed him as musing on actions to take, fighting a war, traveling, and even dying and coming back to life. Elijah’s sarcastic advice to the prophets of Baal played on these beliefs.

Elijah is trying to show that Baal is nothing but a false god. He cannot hear, see or speak. To believe in a false god, that has no power at all is foolish.

1 Kings 18:28 "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."

“The blood gushed out”: Self-laceration was practiced to rouse a god’s pity and response in the ancient world, but was prohibited by the Old Testament law (Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1).

The mocking of Elijah caused them to get more serious about trying to get the attention of their god. Cutting themselves showed they were very serious. They danced around the altar, while cutting themselves. The worship of false gods, sometimes even involve sacrificing humans. The cutting here is showing their willingness to die for their god.

1 Kings 18:29 "And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the [time] of the offering of the [evening] sacrifice, that [there was] neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded."

The prophets of Baal had by evening literally worked themselves into a frenzy (Jer. 29:26). "The evening sacrifice" was the main time of daily religious observance.

"Neither ... nor ... nor": The 3-fold declaration emphasized the complete lack of response on the part of Baal. The fact that there was no response indicated Baal's impotence and non-existence (Jer. 10:5).

Elijah gave them all the time they needed. To pray to a false god could go on forever without results. He allows them to continue all day until the time of the evening sacrifice. There was no response from Baal at all, because he was no god.

1 Kings 18:30 "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD [that was] broken down."

And observe what I do, and what will be done at my request.

"And all the people came near unto him": Left the prophets of Baal to themselves, and took no more notice of them, but attended to what the prophet should say and do.

"And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down": Which had been set up when high places and altars were allowed of, while the tabernacle was unsettled, and the temple not built. This is supposed to have been erected in the times of the judges; though, according to a tradition of the Jews, it was built by Saul (see 1 Sam. 15:12). But had been thrown down by the idolatrous Israelites, who demolished such as were erected to the name of the Lord everywhere, and built new ones for their idols (1 Kings 19:10). Benjamin of Tudela says, that on the top of Mount Carmel is now to be seen the place of the altar Elijah repaired, which is four cubits round.

Now it is God's turn. They had gathered around the altar of Baal waiting for an answer all day, and nothing had happened. Now they are to gather around the altar of the LORD. Elijah restores the altar of God and proceeds.

1 Kings 18:31 "And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name:"

"Twelve stones": The 12 stones represented the 12 tribes, since this contest had significance for both Judah and Israel. Although the tribes had been divided into two nations, they were still one people in the Lord's plans, with the same covenants and a single destiny.

The "twelve stones" was a reminder that God was the covenant God of all "Israel," north and south. Although Baalism was a great problem in the northern kingdom, it was also a constant temptation for Judah (2 Kings 17:15-19).

It is interesting that he took the twelve stones, instead of the ten of just Israel. The kingdom might be divided, but with God they are still all his people. This reminds them that the law was given to all of them on the way to their Promised Land. The name of Jacob had been changed to Israel when he became a nation of twelve tribes.

Verses 32-35: Elijah soaked the altar, the offering and the wood “with water” in order to remove any chance of spontaneous combustion or any claim that he cheated once the offering was consumed with fire.

1 Kings 18:32 "And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed."

“Two measures”: This was about 4 gallons or a third of a bushel of seed.

Altars of stones had been used from the time of Abraham. This altar built to glorify the LORD had represented all the tribes of Israel. Water will be put in the trench around it.

Verses 33-35: The “water” was applied three times. Again, Elijah calls on the full power of the trice-holy God (17:21).

1 Kings 18:33 "And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid [him] on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour [it] on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood."

Just in such manner as sacrifices usually were.

"And said, fill four barrels with water": Either from the brook Kishon, or, if that was dried up, from the sea; for both were near this mountain, and so to be had, though a time of drought.

"And pour it on the burnt sacrifice": That which was intended to be one.

"And upon the wood": Wherewith it was to be burnt, and so made unfit for it; and which would make the miracle appear the greater, when fire came down and consumed it.

The order of the wood and the sacrifice was the law observing these offerings. By doing this, he recognized the law of the LORD. The four barrels of water poured on the offering was to make the burning of this offering even more difficult.

1 Kings 18:34 "And he said, Do [it] the second time. And they did [it] the second time. And he said, Do [it] the third time. And they did [it] the third time."

That is, poured four barrels of water more upon the wood.

"And he said, do it the third time, and they did it the third time": So that there were in all twelve barrels of water poured on the wood, agreeably to the number of the twelve stones the altar was built with, and may have respect to the same as they.

This means there were twelve barrels of water poured over the offering. In the natural, it would have been impossible for this to burn.

1 Kings 18:35 "And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water."

There being such a large effusion of it on it.

"And he filled the trench also with water": Which surrounded the altar, so that it seemed impracticable that any fire should kindle upon it; and this gave full proof and demonstration there could be no collusion in this matter.

The water was so abundant that it ran into the trench as well.

Verses 36-37: In ancient times, each tribe or clan had a god, and each region had a god. The "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (or Jacob), was unique in that He was identified with multiple persons, not a shrine, locale, or particular clan.

1 Kings 18:36 "And it came to pass at [the time of] the offering of the [evening] sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, 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 at thy word."

"The evening sacrifice": This sacrifice was offered around 3:00 p.m. (Exodus 29:38-41; Num. 28:3-8).

The "God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel" (or Jacob), was the identifying phrase of God's relationship to the Abrahamic covenant., The faithful One is yet Israel's God, the only God, and the God with whom they must deal (verse 39 with Exodus 3:6; Deut. 5:7; 6:4; 29:12-13; 30:19-20).

The title "servant" reveals Elijah's function as a prophet and his status before a holy and righteous God. Elijah's request was twofold:

1. That people would know that Yahweh is God, the Creator and Redeemer. When God's people pray for God's glory and honor, they are praying exactly this, that the world will recognize God as God;
2. That the people would turn back to the Lord. Their hearts needed to be as aflame with the power of God as that altar.

1 Kings 18:37 "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou [art] the LORD God, and [that] thou hast turned their heart back again."

Which repetition is made to express his importunity, and the vehement earnest desire of his soul to be heard in such a case, which so much concerned the glory of God. The Targum is, "receive my prayer, O Lord, concerning the fire, and receive my prayer concerning the rain. As if the one respected the sending down the fire on the sacrifice, and the other sending rain on the earth; and which sense is followed by other Jewish writers.

"That this people may know that thou art the Lord God": And not Baal, or any other idol.

And that thou hast turned their heart back again": From idolatry, to the worship of the true God. Though some understand this of God's giving them up to a spirit of error, and suffering them to fall into idolatry, and hardening their hearts, as he did Pharaoh's. But the former sense is best.

This is an unusual prayer, considering the prayer that the prophets of Baal had prayed. This prayer of Elijah is simple, but to the point. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel recognizes the LORD as God of all twelve tribes. He is saying; prove to these unbelieving people that you truly are God. He wants God to turn these people from the worship of false gods to worship of the One True God. He also, asks that God will reveal to them that he is a man of God. The words he speaks are not his, but the LORD speaking through him. They will not turn back to God on their own, so he wants God to turn them back to Him.

Verse 38-39: The "fire" from heaven dramatically revealed the power of God, the true God of the storm, who responded to a humble servant praying for Him to be known. The people "fell on their faces," prostrate, in acknowledgement that Elijah's God was real. Those who see God as He truly is will fall before Him in humility and reverence.

1 Kings 18:38 "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that [was] in the trench."

An extraordinary fire from God out of heaven, as the effects of it shows.

"And consumed the burnt sacrifice": As it had done in former instances (Lev. 9:24), and besides this, which is still more extraordinary.

"And the wood, and the stones, and the dust": Of the altar, thereby signifying that even such were not to be used any more.

"And licked up the water that was in the trench": Around the altar (see 1 Kings 18:32).

This fire of God is so great; it burns everything that had been soaked with water. The fire even laps up all of the water.

Hebrews 12:29 "For our God [is] a consuming fire."

Notice, that the fire of God was so great, that it even burned the stones of the altar.

1 Kings 18:39 "And when all the people saw [it], they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he [is] the God; the LORD, he [is] the God."

They did this in reverence of God. They were astonished at the miracle wrought, ashamed of themselves and their sins, particularly their idolatry, that they should turn their backs on the true God, and follow idols.

"And they said, the Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is the God": Which acknowledgment of God, as the true God, in opposition to Baal, is repeated, to show their firm belief and strong assurance of it.

This would be enough to cause the people to fall on their faces before the LORD. There is no doubt that the LORD, He is God. The fire was the presence of the LORD with these people. It is such a shame that it took a visible manifestation of the LORD before they accepted Him as God.

1 Kings 18:40 "And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."

"Take the prophets": Taking advantage of the excited feelings of the people over the manifestation of Jehovah as the true God, Elijah called on them to seize the priestly imposters and fill the river with their blood, the river that was dried up by their idolatry.

"Brook Kishon": This river, which drains the Jezreel Valley from east to the northwest, was in the valley north of Mt. Camel.

"Slew them": The killing of the 450 prophets of Baal (18:19), fulfilled the law's demands that false prophets be executed (Deut. 13:1-5), and that those embracing idolatry or inciting others to practice it were worthy of death (Deut. 13:13-18; 17:2-7). Further, these deaths were just retribution for Jezebel's killing of the Lord's prophets (verses 4, 13).

This is 450 prophets of Baal that are slaughtered at the brook Kishon. "Kishon" means "hardness". This does not mean that Elijah killed each one of them himself, but he was overseer.

Deuteronomy 18:20 "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die."

1 Kings 18:41 "And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for [there is] a sound of abundance of rain."

"Eat and drink": Elijah instructed Ahab to celebrate the end of the drought.

When this terrible false worship is removed from the land, the drought is over. Elijah speaks, and the rain comes.

1 Kings 18:42 "So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,"

“Cast himself down”: Elijah’s actions expressed his and Israel’s humble submission to God. Elijah prayed for rain this time (17:1; James 5:17), and God again answered (James 5:18). Since the lord’s curse was lifted, the rains would be coming.

“Elijah ... put his face between his knees” in humble reverence. The significance of this posture is well attested in the literature of the ancient Near East (see Luke 18:13; James 5:18).

Ahab did as Elijah had told him; he ate and drank in expectation of the rain. Elijah went to the highest point of the mount, and knelt down with his head between his knees. He was totally humbled before the LORD.

Verses 43-44: Elijah prayed “seven times” for rain to fall on Carmel. Sometimes peace comes instantly; other times it comes slowly as a person lingers before God’s throne. Elijah is an example of how the fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much (James 5:16-18).

1 Kings 18:43 "And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, [There is] nothing. And he said, Go again seven times."

Whom some take to be the son of the widow of Sarepta, but he must be too young to be employed in such service as this was.

"Go up now": Still higher on Mount Carmel; than where he was, even to the highest point of it.

"Look towards the sea": Or the west, as the Targum, the Mediterranean Sea, which lay to the west of the land of Israel.

"And he went up and looked, and he said, there is nothing": There was nothing in the sky, or arising out of the sea, that looked like or foreboded rain.

"And he said, go again seven times": Till he should see something.

Elijah expected the rain. He knew it would be possible to see the rain from a distance from the top of the mount, looking across the sea. Seven times he had his servant to look, because he knew in his heart the rain would come. All the time he continued to pray.

1 Kings 18:44 "And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare [thy chariot], and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not."

Either about the size or in the form of it; rain water comes out of the sea, and, being strained through the clouds and air, becomes fresh.

The “little cloud” proved to be a towering cumulonimbus cloud heralding the coming rainstorm.

"And he said, go up": The meaning seems to be, that he should first go down from the mount, and then go up to that part of it where Ahab was.

"Say unto Ahab, prepare thy chariot": Bind or fasten the horses to it, as the phrase seems to signify.

"And get thee down": From the mountain where he was, to go to Jezreel, which lay low in a valley.

"That the rain stop thee not": On the road, that might be made impassable by it, signifying that such abundance should fall as would make it so.

The rain would come in torrents once it began, so Elijah told Ahab to get in his chariot and hurry home, before the rain caught him.

1 Kings 18:45 "And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel."

“Jezreel”: A town located in the tribal allotment of Issachar at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, north of Mt. Gilboa, about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. Jezreel was Ahab’s winter capital (see 21:1), situated between 15 to 25 miles east of the Carmel Range.

This was not an ordinary rain, but really was a torrent. This is a storm with wind and rain, and would leave the valley very wet and difficult to cross. Ahab heeded Elijah and rode his chariot to Jezreel.

1 Kings 18:46 "And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

“Elijah” probably served as an out runner for the king, a privileged position in the ancient Near East. Despite his frequent condemnation of “Ahab,” Elijah had a genuine concern both for God’s testimony and the soul of the king. The girding up of “his loins” carries with it the ideas of energetic action and obedience (2 Kings 4:29; Prov. 31:17; 1 Peter 1:3).

“Ran”: It was customary in the ancient Near East for kings to have runners before their chariots. The prophet showed Ahab his loyalty by rendering to him that service. Empowered by God, Elijah ran on foot ahead of Ahab’s chariot the 15 to 25 miles from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel.

This is a tremendous strengthening of Elijah's body from the LORD. A man generally cannot out-run horses, but that is what Elijah did. He ran in front of the chariot pulled with horses, all the way to Jezreel.

1 Kings Chapter 18 Continued Questions

1. Where were the people and the false prophets gathered with Elijah?
2. What question did Elijah ask them in verse 21?
3. What challenge did Elijah place before the people?
4. Why did the people not answer Elijah?
5. Who stood with Elijah on Mount Carmel, for God?
6. How many false prophets represented Baal?
7. In verse 23, Elijah calls for what to be sacrificed?
8. How must the True God answer?
9. Who goes first in this challenge?
10. How long did they call on Baal?
11. What did Elijah say to them in a mocking way about Baal?
12. What did they do in desperation to get Baal to answer them?
13. When did Elijah decide to call on God?
14. What did Elijah do, before he offered the sacrifice?
15. How many stones did Elijah use in rebuilding the altar?
16. What did he build around the altar?
17. How many barrels of water did he pour on the sacrifice?
18. What prayer did Elijah pray?
19. What did he ask God to prove to these people?
20. How did God respond?
21. When the fire came down, what did the people do?
22. What did the people cry out?
23. What did Elijah tell the people to do with the prophets of Baal?
24. What did Elijah tell Ahab to do, and why did he tell him to do it?
25. Where did Elijah go to wait for the rain?

26. What did he do, while he was waiting?
27. How many times did Elijah send the servant to look for the rain?
28. What did the servant see the last time?
29. What did Elijah tell Ahab to do?
30. How did Elijah have strength enough to run in front of the chariot of Ahab?