



## Lessons from Elijah's Life

# The Mt. Carmel Contest

Date: 26 February 2020

Text: 1 Kings 18:25-40

Key Lesson: God desires to show Himself strong!

### The Reason for the Contest

**Backsliding:** The people had turned their hearts away from Jehovah and were worshipping Baal. They could not see Jehovah, but they could see Baal. Jehovah required that they live pure and righteous lives. Baal worship included impurity as part of the worship. It was difficult to live Jehovah's way, but easy to live the way of Baal. Baal is a picture of the world.

**Today,** many professing Christians drift away from the Lord for similar reasons. Following the world is much more appealing to the flesh. It is easier. The crowds of the world float with ease downstream, while in comparison few are living for God paddling upstream with difficulty. (Luke 9:23) "And he [Jesus] said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Matthew 7:13-14) "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

**Revival:** Elijah's contest was to identify the true God. Whichever God showed himself to be the true God by burning the sacrifice, the people should follow Him (v.21).

### Let the Contest Begin!

**Boldness:** Did God come up with the contest idea or did Elijah? The Bible does not say. Either way, it was a bold venture. If Elijah failed to pray down fire from heaven, he would lose his life. He was now standing in the presence of his enemies. Elijah trusted God with unwavering faith.

**Faith:** It was now time for the contest. We know the end of the story, but Elijah didn't. He was acting by faith. God had kept him safely hidden from Ahab for 3 ½ years. God caused the ravens to feed him by the brook. God multiplied the widow's meal and oil for hundreds of meals. God answered Elijah's prayer to raise the widow's son from the dead. God told Elijah to show himself to Ahab with the assurance that He would send rain.

**We need faith:** When we face challenges to trust God for something He has clearly promised, we must keep our faith from wavering by recalling previous times when God has proved Himself faithful. The devil wants us to have a great memory of our failures, a forgetful memory of God's forgiveness, and short memory of God's faithfulness. We must focus on God's forgiveness and faithfulness.

### Let the Prophets of Baal go First

**Baal first:** Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to go first. He let them choose the bullock (bull) that they wanted. They were to dress it, which means to kill it, cut it in pieces and prepare it for their sacrifice. They were then to call on the name of their gods. Again, he demanded that they put no fire under the sacrifice. This was to be a challenge to see whose deity would be able to send down fire.

**Fire:** Keathley points out that fire in the Bible was a sign of several things.<sup>1</sup> First, it was a sign of God's presence (Exodus 3:2; 13:21-22). Second, it was a sign of God's acceptance of a sacrifice (Leviticus 9:24). Third, it was a means of purification (Numbers 31:21-23). Fourth, it was a sign of God's judgment (Hebrews 10:29). Fifth, here on Mount Carmel, it would demonstrate God's acceptance of Elijah's sacrifice.

**It was now morning** (v.26). The word used for "morning" literally means the break of day. They took their bull, prepared it, and began calling on Baal from early morning until noon. These false worshippers began their pleading with Baal in the early morning. It is sad that even today many among false religions and cults get up early to worship their gods, yet many Christians lack the discipline to get up early to worship the LORD God of the universe.

### Their Desperate Attempt

**Begging:** The false prophets begged Baal to hear them and send fire, yet they received no response. They even leaped or hopped upon the altar. They danced wildly to impress their god in hopes that he would send fire.

**Elijah Mocked:** At noon, Elijah began to mock them (v.27). After perhaps six hours of their foolishness dancing and unanswered prayers, Elijah could stand it no longer. He mocked that their god might be busy talking (i.e. meditating), or pursuing (i.e., moving away), or on a journey, or even sleeping and must be awakened. He was rather hard on them, but he wanted them roused to their greatest devotion. He wanted none to say they did not give it their best. This stirred them up to a tremendous frenzy. They cried louder and

<sup>1</sup> Keathley, <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-ineffectual-prayers-baal-priests-1-kings-1823-29>

began **cutting** themselves with knives and lancets (i.e. spears) after their manner (v.28). This was the typical manner of their pleading with their god for help.

**True Prayer:** It is sad that some in the name of "Christianity" have tortured themselves in numbers ways doing penance to atone for wrong and gain mercy from God. **That is so wrong!** God is not stubborn and difficult to persuade. Getting an answer from God simply requires a **personal relationship** with Him, a **clean** heart, a **right** motive, a **biblical** request, a **sincere** spirit and **unwavering** faith. God does not always give us what we want, but if our prayer is right, He will give us what is best.

**Evening:** The frantic begging of the false prophets continued until the time of the sacrifice. Our KJV translators supplied the word *evening* because that was the next prescribed sacrifice for the Jews. (Exodus 29:39) "The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even." Some claim that the evening sacrifice was at the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (3:00 p.m.) while others say it was between the evenings (about the 12<sup>th</sup> hour or 6:00 p.m.). The 9<sup>th</sup> hour seems more probable (v.29). As this time approached, Elijah stepped up and prepared for his turn.

## **Elijah's Turn**

**Outnumbered:** Elijah was the outnumbered 450 to 1, yet he boldly took his stand for the Lord. Often unbelievers and compromisers will outnumber faithful Christians. When that is the case, we must bravely take our stand for the Lord.

**Assembly:** He began by calling **all** the people to come near (v.30). After so many hours of noise and gore, the people had drifted to some distance. This was the **critical moment** for Elijah. Had God promised him privately that He would send fire; or was Elijah stepping out on **faith**? We do not know. Either way, he moved forward with confidence.

**Altar:** He began by **repairing** the altar of the LORD that was broken down. It may have been an altar used by Israel before the erection of the Temple. After the building of the Temple, God forbid worship on high places like this one on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 3:2) "Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days." In this situation, God accepted the location.

**Preparation:** Elijah took **twelve** stones (one for each of Israel's tribes, v.31) and built an altar in the name of Jehovah (v.32). He then dug a **trench** around the altar. The trench would hold about two measures of seed, which was about 10 litres. That is not very deep, yet this is a **rocky ledge**. He then put the wood in order, cut up the bull and placed it on the wood. He then ordered the observers to pour **twelve barrels** (i.e., jar or bucket) of water over the entire sacrifice. Someone had the difficult job of carrying the water, probably from the ocean below the mount, but I can imagine that many sceptics would have happily volunteer for such a duty. The water drenched the altar and filled the trench (v.35).

## **Elijah's Prayer Brought Fire**

**Short Prayer:** Elijah was a man of prayer. He prayed **often** and he prayed **effectively**. The time had come. The sacrifice was wet and ready. With a loud voice for all to hear, Elijah **calmly** and **confidently** prayed a **brief** yet powerful prayer of just 63 English words (v.36-37). Though he did not specifically pray for fire to come down, he clearly identified the LORD God. He asked that the people would know that Jehovah is God in Israel. He asked that the **people might know** that he had obeyed God's Word. He asked that the LORD would **make it clear that it was He** who turn the people's hearts back again to truth.

**Answered Prayer:** As soon as his prayer was finished, the **fire** of the LORD fell from heaven. It burned up everything including the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and the water.

## **The People's Response**

**Change:** This sudden and fearful display of fire from heaven instilled faith and the **fear of the LORD** in the hearts of the people. They fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God." (v.39) The Baal worshippers had lost and Elijah had won. Baal was a lifeless idol. Jehovah is the true and living God. In all this, King **Ahab shows no sign of repentance** or change.

**Execution:** With renewed faith in God, the people obeyed Elijah's command to **take captive all** the prophets of Baal. He led them down to the brook Kishon and **slew** or killed them there with the sword. Ahab knew that he dared not oppose this action because the people had just watched the mighty power of God.

**Application:** We need to pray specifically and when God answers, we ought to with renewed faith, praise Him and serve Him more passionately. (2 Chronicles 16:9) "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. ..."