

THE LIFE & TIMES OF ELIJAH (Part 4)

“Contest at Carmel” (1 Kings 18:16-46)

INTRO: It has been three years since King Ahab and Elijah last met (17:1). In the interim Elijah had been through basic and advanced training. He was now prepared for the biggest battle of his life. “Go...” (17:3, 9) was rescinded. Now “Go...show” (18:1). LESSONS. . . MAP. . .

Perhaps no more dramatic scene in Scripture. A classic showdown between two explosive personalities. Tension was high after more than 3 years of deadly drought. A winner-take-all-affair. This was more than an Ahab-Elijah conflict. It was a duel of deities. Baal the rain God vs. Jehovah God. In one corner was Baal, Ahab, Jezebel, & 850 heathen prophets, and in the other was Elijah alongside Jehovah God.

I. THE CONFRONTATION (vv. 16-29)

A. THE PROBLEM (vv.16-18) - the CAUSE of the TROUBLE

Elijah, now prepared and trained, was ready to meet wicked Ahab with the truth. The wicked always blame believers for the trouble in the world - never think their own sins to be the blame. Throughout the dialogue it was Elijah who maintained initiative. Ahab and his father (Omri) were the real reason for Israel's troubles. They had abandoned the Lord's commands to not follow Baal. The natural physical problems of the nation were spiritual, the result of sin. They got involved in name-calling one another: “Troubler of Israel” & “Follower of Baal”. The Israelites had not totally rejected the Lord to follow Baal. They wanted both!

B. THE PLACE (vv.19-20) the CALL to CARMEL

“Why Mt. Carmel?” Regional HQ for Baal worship and believed to be the special dwelling place of the gods, esp. weather. Also Mt. Carmel was usually the first place in Israel to get rain. A fitting place for Elijah to rescind his anti-rain order.

C. The PROPOSAL (vv.21-24)...the CHALLENGE to CONSIDER:

1. PEOPLE (v.21) - Many had no doubt heard of Elijah but only a few may have ever seen him before now. It was time for the people to choose and to decide (Josh. 24:15). Confronted with their sins, the people answered nothing.
2. PROPHETS (vv 22-24) - Now a proposal to the false prophets. Elijah threw down the gauntlet, declaring war against them - a divine duel to the death. The god who answered by fire was the true God. The people agreed. Elijah proposed a humanly impossible situation in which to win. Elijah declared the rules of the game.

D. The POWER FAILURE (vv 25-29) - the COLLAPSE of BAAL

1. (vv. 25-26) Elijah let them go first in choosing the bull to sacrifice. All morning (some 6 hrs.) they called on Baal but he was silent (Psa. 115:2-8) - “No response; no one answered”
2. (v.27) Elijah's sarcastically ridiculed the lack of response - “At noon” - hottest time of day he begins to mock and taunt them. Was he “deep in

thought”? Thinking or meditating? Was he “busy”? Gone to toilet! “Traveling”? On a trip or vacation? “Sleeping”? Too tired? Hard of hearing?

3. (vv.28-29) Prophet's responded with a greater frenzy - all to no avail: “No response, no one answered, no one paid attention.” This went on until 3 pm “the time for the evening sacrifice.” Note: Sincerity in religion or in worship is not the issue. No doubting their faith either. Their faith had the wrong object!

II. THE CONFIRMATION (vv. 30-38)

Now it was Elijah's turn, the ball was in his court. In contrast to the frantic phony prophets, Elijah calmly and measuredly did two things:

A. He PREPARED the (vv.30-35):

1. PEOPLE (v.30a) - Elijah invites all the people to move closer to see better - no chicanery or trickery.
2. ALTAR (vv.30b-35) - He repaired the Lord's altar...He had it “thoroughly drenched” with the salt water from nearby sea. Eventually a soggy mess, even water in the trench. All the time tension mounts.

B. Next, He PRAYED (vv.36-37) - Note three things in his prayer: He is the only true & living God (v.36). We are to be obedient His servants (v.36). He can change lives (v.37). IMAGE. . . My two slides

*RESULT? (v. 38) God's confirmation came, “then the fire of the Lord fell...,” consuming not only the sacrifice, but also the wood, the stones, the dust, & the water as well. An awesome display of power confirming the true God and Elijah's faith.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES (vv.39-46)

- A. (v.39) The people responded by falling prostrate in *humble repentance* and crying to the one true God with *heartly acceptance*. No one could argue now! Baal was a nonexistent impostor. Jehovah was true God (1 John 5:19-21).
- B. (v.40) Holy obedience - Elijah ordered all the false prophets to be destroyed. The nation's malignancy must be removed. We must not only acknowledge God but also remove evil. Now, the rains come (vv. 41-46).

MORE LESSONS

1. When we are confident we're in God's will, we're invincible.
2. Divided loyalty is as wrong as open idolatry.
3. Prayer matters.
4. Never underestimate the impact of one totally devoted life.

CONC: “How can you know the fire of God in your life?”

1. Surrender - Openly declare your allegiance to God.
2. Obey - Instantly (and completely) obey His every command. The Christian life is better done than said.
3. Prepare - Willingly receive your times of preparation and training. God works in us so He can work through us.
4. Repent - Constantly deal with sin in your life and keep the altar repaired.
5. Trust - Humbly live on the edge of faith and divine intervention & provision.
6. Expect - Prayerfully expect God to change and empower your life.