

1 Kings 18:17-40 Elijah: Victory at Mount Carmel

After three years of eluding Jezebel's henchmen with orders to kill every prophet of God – especially Elijah, the prophet confronts Ahab and challenges him to a public reckoning: Yahweh vs. Baal. However, in spite of the detailed preparations, boasts, blood-letting and consuming fire, the point of the exercise isn't the confrontation with Ahab but with a wayward people:

1 Kings 18:21: “And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.”

- Grammatical Usage: “limping” in the Hebrew “pacach” meaning, “to become lame.”
- Literal Interpretation: And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will continue to be lame because of two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.
- Contextual/Comparison: God keeps His Word, God continually uses His Word. The Holy Spirit has led the writer to give us a vivid and dramatic record of Elijah's great challenge on Mount Carmel. These biblical records are actual history; in **1 Kings 18:17-40** we read of fact, not fiction. The whole story is intensely dramatic. The most important value of the incident, however, is that it is permanently challenging. The lessons of the incident abide. What are they? Let us answer this question by asking: What is the greatest need in the Church today? Is it for people, money, machinery or methods? No! What did Elijah need? He needed evidence that God was alive and active, so that the people would believe on God and turn to Him. What we need is the burning, consuming, illuminating and empowering fire of the Holy Spirit to fall upon the work that God has committed to us. How can we obtain this fire? **Verse 38** states – “**Then the fire of the Lord fell...**” What preceded “then”? It is clear that the fire of God only falls when all His requirements are met. When did it fall?

1. IT WAS WHEN ELIJAH YEILDED TO GOD

Elijah's life was filled with turmoil. At times he was bold and decisive, and at other times fearful and tentative. He alternately demonstrates victory and defeat, followed by recovery. Elijah knew both the power of God and the depths of depression as we shall see. But the point is, at times Elijah felt not up to the task but consider:

Moses had anger issues, stuttered, and murdered a man, yet he was God's chosen vessel to deliver his people from their enemies; remember that Noah was a drunk; Abraham was too old; Jacob was a liar; Leah was ugly; Joseph was abused; Gideon was fearful; Samson was a backsliding womanizer; Rahab was a prostitute; Jeremiah was too young; David was an adulterer, a murderer, and a negligent father; Solomon forgot God; Elijah was depressed and suicidal; Jonah was a bigot and ran from God; Naomi was a widow; Job lost everything; Matthew worked for the I.R.S; Peter denied Christ; the disciples were clueless,

argumentative, prideful, had little faith and failed Jesus at his darkest hour; Martha had her priorities all wrong; the Samaritan woman had lived with five men out of wedlock; Zacchaeus was a cheat; Paul was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man; and LAZARUS WAS DEAD!

Elijah, despite personal shortcomings, heard God's word (**18:1**) and, compounded by a 'kill on site' order and the laws of science, obeyed God's word come what may.

2. IT WAS WHEN THE ALTAR WAS REPAIRED

V. 30: the very first thing Elijah did in preparation for the coming of the fire was to repair the altar of the Lord. Idolatry and apostasy had been prevalent for so long that God's altars had been broken down, and Elijah now engaged in the work of repair. What is the significance of this for us? Surely, that the fire of the Lord only falls, (in the life, the church or the work that He has committed to us to do for Him), when the Lord is given His rightful place (**Colossians 1:18**).

3. IT WAS WHEN THE SACRIFICE WAS OFFERED

V. 33: The sacrifice was a bullock, which Elijah cut up and placed, piece by piece, on the altar. Compare **Romans 12:1; 6:13**, and ask yourself: how many of the pieces of my life have I really offered to the Lord upon the altar, and how many of my members are yielded fully to Him "as instruments of righteousness"?

4. IT WAS WHEN THE WATER WAS POURED

Vv: 33-35: The pagan priests were notorious for their trickery in deceiving the people with false signs and lying wonders. Elijah was preparing to offset this, so after placing the pieces of sacrifice upon the altar he drenched both altar and sacrifice with water, not only once or twice but three times, until **v. 35**! What things do we substitute for the fire of the Lord? Are we proud of our lovely churches, organs, choirs, dazzling oratory, good collections, etc.? What are any of these without the power of Pentecost?

5. IT WAS WHEN THE PRAYER WAS MADE

Vv. 36-37: Elijah was a man of prayer; it was the habit of his life. He did not only pray when he was in trouble (**James 5:16-18**). Read verses 36 and 37 several times, and notice when, where and how he prayed. The one all-embracing condition which must be met if God's fire is to fall is – prayer, more prayer and yet more prayer. If we will really pray, sooner or later the fire will fall – in our lives and in our work for the Lord.

6. THE TESTING THAT HE EXPERIENCED

There is a dramatic shift in Elijah's prayer between **vv. 36-37**: "**that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command**"; but in **v. 37**, "**so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.**" Why do we want the fire of the Lord to fall, to be empowered for service and to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Only for ourselves? Or is it only when our motive is that God should be glorified and His Name honored and exalted that the fire of the Lord will fall.

➤ Conclusion: Whom are you seeking to exalt?