

Elijah – Prophet of Confrontation #6
Elijah and the Contest on Mt. Carmel
1 Ki 18:21-40

Introduction:

1. It is time for the great confrontation with the prophets of Baal
2. The drought has conditioned the people and Ahab to be more receptive to the ministry of Elijah, so they agree to meet him at Mt. Carmel
3. The plateaus made Mt. Carmel a good place for a great crowd to gather to view the proceedings
4. The height of Mt. Carmel made it possible for people from miles around to see the fire that came down from heaven.
5. The crowd must have been fairly substantial in order to subdue and slay the 450 prophets of Baal
 - a. Estimates run from 2000 to 20,000 people gathered
 - b. That Ahab issued a royal invitation would increase attendance
 - c. The stress of the times would increase interest in this meeting

I. Before the Contest – vs 18-25

A. Wavering of the Crowd – vs 19-21

19 Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. 20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel. 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.

1. The Character of the Wavering
 - a) *“Halt” - means to waver between 2 opinions or ideas*
 - b) *The prophets of Baal were committed to him, the people were not*
2. The Condemnation of the Wavering
 - a) *“Make up your mind – get in or get out”*
 - b) *You are either for the Lord or against Hi- no middle ground*
 - c) *Many want the smile of God and the favor of the world*
3. The Consequences of the Wavering
 - a) *Israel was paying a high price for their vacillating*
 - b) *Elijah finished speaking the people “answered him not a word*
4. Baal was considered the god of the rain and harvest
 - a) *There has been no rain for 3.5 yrs - Where is Baal?*
 - b) *The famine created debates, doubt, confusion and emptiness in the people*

B. Introducing the Contest – vs 22-24

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. 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: 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.

1. The Need of the Contest

a) *The contest was needed because God ordered it*

- (1) vs 36 – “At thy word”
- (2) We are to examine religious claims to check their validity
- (3) In the OT, God gave plenty of tests to determine if a prophet was true or false
- (4) 1 Jn 4:1 – we are told to “try the spirits”
- (5) 1 Thess 5:21 – “prove all things”

b) *The contest was needed because error is so perilous*

- (1) Israel paid a terrible price because of Baal worship
- (2) The cults are full because many people fail to test religious claims

c) *The contest was needed to honor truth*

- (1) In Israel truth was being dishonored, rejected and despised
- (2) No land prospers when truth is not honored
- (3) Truth doesn't mind close examination

2. The Equality of the Contest

a) *The test was fair for all involved*

b) *One bullock, one altar, one answer by fire*

c) *Elijah was fair in letting the prophets of Baal go first*

- (1) He was not staging a contest that would favor him
- (2) Truth does not need special privilege to prove that it is valid

3. The Winner of the Contest

a) *“The god who answers by fire, let him be true”*

b) *Fire is important in the worship of Baal and Jehovah*

- (1) Baal was the god of fire
- (2) Moses was called at the burning bush
- (3) Children of Israel were led by the pillar of fire

c) *Fire spoke of judgment*

- (1) In the drought situation, you would think that they would agree that the first god to send rain would be true
- (2) Before blessing would come, judgment must come

4. The Endorsement of the Contest – vs 24

a) *The people liked the plan for the contest*

b) *Elijah did not present the plan to the prophets of Baal first, he presented the plan to the people first*

c) *Since the people liked the plan, it made it harder to the prophets of Baal to refuse the contest*

II. During the Contest – vs 26-38

A. Distinctives of Baal Worship

1. It was Popular – vs 22

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.

- a) Followers of Baal far outnumbered followers of God
- b) Elijah was outnumbered 450 to 1
- c) In 19:18 God said that there were 7000 people who had not bowed the knee to Baal while millions had bowed to Baal
- d) Worship of Baal was the religion of the king and govt, worship of God was despised and rejected
- e) Truth is not determined by the number of followers or by the earthly rank or social status of the members

2. It was Deceitful – vs 23, 25

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: 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.

- a) Fraud often abounds in false religions and deceit is one of their trademarks
- b) Because of this Elijah twice told the prophets of Baal not to light a fire under the altar- vs 23, 25

3. It was Dedicated – vs 26

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.

- a) False religions do not lack zeal, they often shame us
- b) The Baal prophets called on Baal for 6 hrs, leaped on the altar and finally cut themselves
- c) What excitement, what entertainment for the onlookers
- d) Remember that earnestness is no sign of validity- sincerity is no guarantee of truth

4. It was Gory – vs 28

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

5. It was Embarrassing – vs 27, 29

- a) They received no response from Baal – vs 26b

26 ...O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered....

b) *They received no respect from Elijah – vs 27*

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.

- (1) Some have criticized Elijah for this mocking
- (2) The worship of idols is ridiculous and should be exposed for what it is
- (3) Some people don't like it when the preacher calls sin by name
- (4) Some don't like it when the preacher points out error in other religions or denominations

c) *They received no regard from the people – vs 29*

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.

- (1) The people were not impressed with Baal
- (2) The false prophets gave the people nothing to cheer about or rejoice in

B. Distinctives of Jehovah Worship

1. Invitation – vs 30

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.

- a) *Elijah invited the people to come near*
- b) *He wanted to be completely open and honest*
- c) *Truth is not hurt by investigation, scrutiny*
- d) *The invitation showed the grace of God*

- (1) Wicked Israel deserved to be killed, but the invitation was to come near
- (2) God's favorite word is "come"

2. Restoration – vs 31-32

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: 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.

- a) *Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down*
- b) *The altar spoke of communion with God*
- c) *See the condition of the altar – "broken down"*

- (1) False religion influenced the people so much that they pulled the altar of God down
- (2) False religion is destructive

d) *The construction of the altar – 12 stones*

e) *The contents of the altar*

- (1) Bullock was a sin offering
- (2) Wood was set in order

3. Saturation – vs 33-35

33 And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrells with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. 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. 35 And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

a) *Demonstrated the practice of integrity*

b) *Demonstrated the power of God*

- (1) False religion couldn't get a fire started in the middle of the day when the sun was at it's hottest
- (2) God can start a fire even when the wood is wet and the trench is filled with water

c) *Demonstrated the priority of the Word*

- (1) Elijah put water on the wood since God commanded it
- (2) It didn't make sense and might hinder the desired result
- (3) Are we willing to give the Word of God such a place in our life?

4. Supplication – vs 36

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.

a) *Elijah prayed for the glory of God – not for rain*

b) *Elijah prayed for his own testimony*

- (1) This would not be easy to pray when you are outnumbered 450 to 1
- (2) Elijah wanted all the world to know where he stood

c) *Elijah prayed for the exalting of God's Word*

- (1) True religion puts emphasis on God's Word
- (2) False religions emphasize the writings of man

d) *Elijah prayed for revival for the people*

- (1) They needed revival before they needed rain
- (2) Spiritual blessings are more important than material

5. Conflagration – vs 37-38

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. 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.

a) *Fire fell in abundance and consumed everything*

b) *The fire fell on the altar and not on the people*

III. After the Contest – vs 39-40

A. The Exaltation of Jehovah – vs 39

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.

1. Declaration of the People
 - a) *The only way to praise Jehovah is as God*
 - b) *True religion declares the deity of Christ*
2. Delinquency of the Praise
 - a) *It was right that the people should fall on their faces and praise God, but they should have done it sooner*
 - b) *They should not have left off the worship of God*

B. The Execution of Evil Doers – vs 40

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.

1. Proof
 - a) *It is one thing to praise God, it is another thing to prove the reality of the charge*
 - b) *The people obey Elijah when he told them to execute the prophets of Baal*
2. Proper
 - a) *Some people criticize the slaying of the prophets of Baal*
 - b) *It was scriptural – Deut 13:5*

5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.
 - c) *It was beneficial*
 - (1) These prophets of Baal had brought untold trouble on Israel
 - (2) The teaching of these prophets damned the souls of many
3. Partial
 - a) *The 450 prophets of Baal were killed, but the 400 prophets of Astarte were not killed*
 - b) *This caused the death of Ahab later when the 400 prophets advised him to go into battle and he was killed*

Conclusion:

1. Are you double minded? Wanting to live for the Lord and enjoy world
2. Like Lot's wife – walking away but always looking back