

# 1 KINGS 18:16-46

**16** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. **17** When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

**18** “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals. **19** Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

**20** So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. **21** Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.

**22** Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. **23** Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. **24** Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

**25** Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since

there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” **26** So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

**27** At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” **28** So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. **29** Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

**30** Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. **31** Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” **32** With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs[a] of seed. **33** He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

**34** “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. **35** The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

**36** At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. **37** Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” **38** Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

**39** When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!” **40** Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there. **41** And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” **42** So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

**43** “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.” **44** The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’”

**45** Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. **46** The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.



**How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him** Elijah's appeal also called his hearers to account for the period of time in which they had not made a decision between Yahweh and Baal. "How long," he asked them. "How many more sermons do you want? How many more Sundays must roll away wasted? How many warnings, how many sicknesses, how many toilings of the bell to warn you that you must die? How many graves must be dug for your family before you will be impressed? How many plagues and pestilences must ravage this city before you will turn to God in truth? How long halt ye between two opinions?" (Spurgeon).

**They cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them:** The prophets of Baal were so committed that they expressed it in their own blood. "This was done according to the rites of that barbarous religion; if the blood of the bullock would not move him they thought their own blood might; and with it they smeared themselves and their sacrifice." (Clarke)

**Come near to me:** This was for the people's benefit. They needed to pay attention so they would see that the LORD was a true God, in contrast to the silent Baal.

**He repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down:** Elijah was very aware that he repaired something that once stood strong.

**Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood** "There can be no question of trickery, such as the use of naphtha [a flammable liquid often used as a solvent] instead of water, or mirrors for ignition as suggested by some scholars. The opposition was observant and close." (Wiseman)

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**And that I have done all these things at Your word** This also was essential, and helps us to understand the whole event. Elijah did this according to the word of God. It wasn't prompted because of his own cleverness, because of presumption or because of vainglory. God led Elijah to this showdown with the prophets of Baal. "It was no whim of his to chastise the nation with a draught. It was no scheme of his, concocted in his own brain, that he should put the Godhead of Jehovah or of Baal to the test by a sacrifice to be consumed by miraculous fire." (Spurgeon)

**Then the fire of the LORD fell** "The action of this fire was in every case downward, contrary to the nature of all earthly and material fire." (Clarke)

"Elijah's petition had lasted less than a minute but produced spectacular results. The difference lay in the One addressed." (Patterson and Austel)

**The fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench:** When the fire of God fell, its work was beyond expectation. It would have been enough if merely the cut-up pieces of bull on the altar were ignited, but God wanted more than simple vindication - He wanted to glorify Himself among the people.

**Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape** Since this was a contest between Yahweh and Baal, the prophets of each deity had to be responsible for their respective results. The great sin of King Ahab was his official sponsorship of the prophets of Baal, and now that the fraud of Baal was exposed, his prophets had to answer for it and were dealt with according to the Law of Moses.

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#19

## ELIJAH: ANSWERED BY FIRE

NO CITIZEN HAS A RIGHT  
TO BE AN AMATEUR  
IN THE MATTER OF  
PHYSICAL TRAINING

...WHAT A DISGRACE  
IT IS FOR A MAN TO  
GROW OLD WITHOUT  
EVER SEEING THE  
BEAUTY AND STRENGTH  
OF WHICH HIS  
BODY IS CAPABLE

-SOCRATES

