

ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

(Acts 3:19a)

Purpose: To show that God is not willing that men should perish, but calls them to repentance.

When Ahab became king of Israel, he did more evil in the sight of the Lord than all the kings of Israel before him.

King Ahab not only turned away from God himself to worship Baal, he led the entire nation of Israel to do the same.

People who refused to worship Baal were persecuted or driven out of the country, and every prophet of God that could be found was put to death.

Suddenly, one day the king heard a voice burst forth like a thunder-clap! And there before him stood a stranger.

“As the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand there shall not be dew or rain until the time I call for it!” Elijah the prophet had come to call Israel back to the Lord God!

The people stood in stunned silence as Elijah turned to leave. No prophet of God had spoken for a long time. Still the people paid little attention to Elijah’s message or to its real meaning.

Elijah had uttered a warning! Hunger was coming to the land of Israel, for drought and famine go hand in hand. Elijah was going to show Israel that they were serving a dead god. Only the Lord could send rain.

For three years no rain fell in the land of Israel. The grass disappeared from the hills. The cattle became lean and thin. Nothing grew in the farmers’ fields, and day by day the people had less to eat.

In every home in the land people suffered from hunger. Unless rain came soon there would be no food at all! But day after day passed, and no rain came.

People began to think more and more about what Elijah had said. Elijah must be a great prophet! Only a prophet with mighty power could hold back the rain.

And when the king saw his land turning to desert, his animals dying of hunger, even the king believed Elijah’s words and sent messengers to find the prophet.

The messengers always returned with the same answer: *“Elijah is nowhere to be found.”*

King Ahab grew so desperate that he sent to every city and country around, and made people swear they were not hiding the prophet.

Messengers came to fear for their very lives, for the king was furious at their failure to find Elijah. And as the famine increased in the land the king’s fury increased with it.

The Bible tells us that after many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, *“Go show thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”*

So Elijah suddenly appeared again. He stood in the path before Obadiah, the king's servant, and said, *"Go tell your king that Elijah has returned."* And Obadiah hurried to obey.

King Ahab listened to Obadiah's report with a grim silence. Elijah would find it was a serious matter to stand in the way of the king!

But Elijah was not afraid. He waited calmly for the king to come, and when the king cried angrily...

... *"Are you the one who's been troubling Israel?"*

Elijah answered, *"I have not troubled Israel. It is you and your father's house because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord!"*

"You have worshipped Baal, the god of the heathen!" Elijah boldly accused the king.

And King Ahab found he couldn't answer the prophet of God. The king had no authority before the word of God as spoken by Elijah. If Ahab wanted rain, he would have to do the listening.

So the king listened as Elijah told him to gather all the people of Israel and all the prophets of Baal and bring them together on Mount Carmel. And the king did all that Elijah said to do.

From every corner of the kingdom the people came, wondering what this strange and terrible prophet would do now. Would Elijah bring back the rain?

But Elijah had something to do first that was more important to the lives of these people than rain. Elijah must show Israel they were serving a dead god – that only the Lord could bring rain.

Elijah came straight to the point. *"Why do you follow first one god and then another?"* he asked. *"If the Lord is God, follow the Lord. If Baal is god, then follow him."*

And the people answered him not a word! Famine and hunger had made them willing to listen, but sin had blinded their eyes and made their ears slow to hear.

Then Elijah spoke again. *"I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord. But Baal's prophets..."*

...are 450 men. Let them prepare a sacrifice. I will do the same. Then we'll call upon our gods. And the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God."

And all the people answered and said, *"It is well spoken."*

Elijah just stood by as the prophets of Baal prepared their sacrifice, and called on their god from morning even until noon: *"O Baal, hear us!"*

The prophets leaped and danced about their altar. But there was no sign from Baal. Baal did not answer.

At noon Elijah mocked the prophets, and said, *"Cry louder! For Baal is a god! He may be talking, or away on a journey. Maybe he's asleep and needs to be awakened!"*

Then the prophets of Baal cried louder than ever. They leaped about in a wild frenzy and begged their god to answer.

They even cut themselves with knives, that Baal might take pity on them. And all the time the people watched, and waited.

Then Elijah called the people to come near him as he prepared a sacrifice.

First, Elijah took twelve stones and built again the broken altar of the Lord.

He put the wood in place and laid the sacrifice upon the altar.

And Elijah made a great trench all around the altar of the Lord. Then he did a very strange thing.

Elijah told the people to bring barrel after barrel of water...

...and pour them over the altar, until all of it was soaked, and the trench was filled to the brim. If fire consumed this sacrifice nobody could say it started by accident!

In tense silence the people watched as Elijah came to the altar 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."*

"Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and Thou hast turned their heart back again!" And suddenly...

...the fire of the Lord fell!

And the sacrifice, the altar, the water, even the dust of the ground was consumed before the eyes of the people!

And they fell on their faces and said, *"The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God!"* The whole nation of Israel turned again to the Lord and worshipped Him as the only living God. Only then did Elijah begin to think about rain.

The Bible says that Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and cast himself down upon the earth to pray. And he said to his servant, *"Go up now, look toward the sea."*

And when the servant looked and said, *"There is nothing,"* Elijah sent him seven times until the servant reported, *"Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand."*

Then Elijah sent his servant to warn the king that rain was coming. The Lord had called His people to repentance, and when they turned back to God, He blessed the people with a great rain.

Through His Word, the Bible, the Lord still calls: *"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."* (Acts 3:19)