

The "Show-Down" at Mt. Carmel

1 Kings 18:17-40

This is the account of the "face-off" between the true God of Israel and the false god of Baal on Mt. Carmel. A contest between good and evil. It is one of the most dramatic episodes in the Bible.

Will the True God Please Stand Up! [vs. 21, 24, 36-39]

I. **The CONFRONTATION between Elijah and Ahab** (vs. 16-19).

- The world always thinks it's problems are because of preachers (vs. 17-18; Jer. 38:4; Luke 23:5; Acts 16:18-22; 24:5). The problem with the mayor of Houston is not preachers. The real trouble-makers are those who sin and lead others to sin.

II. **The CALL to decide** (vs. 19-21).

A. The DESIGNATED place (v. 19).

- According to Biblical historians, Baalite priests usurped Mt. Carmel as Baal's domain.¹ [Note v. 30—"...*the altar of the Lord that was broken down.*"] In other words, Mt. Carmel gave Baal "home court advantage." For God to defeat Baal on his own turf, would further emphasize God's supremacy and Baal's powerlessness.

B. The DEMAND to choose (v. 21 cf. Ex. 32:26; Josh. 24:15).

- "*Halt*" means to "totter"—shifting weight from one leg to another—back and forth. The Israelites were worshipping the Lord one minute then Baal the next (cf. James 1:8). Elijah was calling Israel to make up their mind—Get on or get off! God will not accept a divided heart—He will have all or none (Mt. 6:24).
- A call of discipleship—Your theology will determine who you will follow. The god you believe in will determine how you live.
- Indecision—To not answer amounts to saying "no." It is impossible to be neutral in this decision (Mt. 12:30).

¹ M.C. Astour, 'Carmel, Mount,' IDBS, 141

When Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, went over to Germany to help the Protestant princes in the cause of the Reformation, he was sorely tried by their lack of decision and lukewarmness. On meeting the ambassador of the Elector of Brandenburg, he uttered these stirring and memorable words: "This I say unto you plainly beforehand. I will hear and know nothing of neutrality. His Highness must be friend or foe. When I come to his border he must declare himself hot or cold. The battle is between God and the devil. Will his Highness hold with God? let him stand at my side. Will he prefer to hold with the devil? then he must fight against me. No third position will be granted him."

III. **The CHALLENGE of fire** (vs. 22-24).

- There was the test of fire. Before God would end the 3½ years of drought (vs. 1, 41), Baal had to be discredited and Jehovah declared to be God. If God sent the rain before sending the fire, the people may have claimed it was Baal who sent it.
- A. The ABSENCE from the challenge. Of the 850 false prophets that ate at Jezebel's table (v. 19), only 450 answer the challenge. The other 400 show up later in 2 Kings.
- B. The ASPECTS of the challenge.
 1. Center around a slain sacrifice.
 2. Confirm the power of prayer.
 3. Manifest the true God.
 - This is the same three-fold challenge of true religion: (1) Does it center on the sacrifice of Christ's death on Calvary? (2) Does it give evidence God answers prayer? (3) Can the reality of God be seen in it's ministries?
- C. The ACCEPTANCE of the challenge (v. 24). They were so deceived they actually believed Baal would answer by fire! Satan's deception knows no bounds! Evolution is a fact... Mohammad and Joseph Smith were actually prophets... etc.

IV. **The CONTEST of Baal and God** (vs. 25-40).

➤ God's power is not dependent or diminished by numerical odds—450 Baalite priests (vs. 19, 25—“...*for ye are many...*”), versus one prophet of God (Rom. 8:31).

A. The DELUSION of false religion (vs. 26-29).

1. The **sneering** by Elijah (v. 27). Elijah heckles the prophets.

[When Jesus came the first time, some mistook Him as being Elijah. What was in Christ's ministry that reminded them of Elijah? His miracles and His derision of the Pharisees (Ps. 2:4; 59:8 cf. Mt. 23:14-15, 24-25, 27, 33).

- v. 28—Exhorted by Elijah, the Baalite prophets increase the decibels of their prayers. Loudness or length of prayer doesn't equate to effectiveness in prayer (Mt. 6:5-7). What matters is (1) the God to whom the prayer is made; and (2) the character and faith of the one who is praying.

2. The **steadfastness / suffering** of the prophets (v. 28).

- Satan is persistent. Self mutilation. If people will be this dedicated to a false religion, why can't Christians be as zealous for the truth?

3. The **silence** of false religion (v. 29).

- Baal's beeper must have been turned off.
- This was of the Lord. The devil could have sent fire from heaven (Job 1:9-12; Rev. 13:11-14). But God withheld him. [The devil could have sent rain earlier, but God stopped him to prove Baal was a false god.]

B. The DEMONSTRATION of fire (vs. 30-38).

➤ Note the contrast of Elijah's simple approach opposed to that of the frenzied antics of Baal's prophets—There was no fanatical screaming, blabbering, lengthy praying (4-6 hours), running around, jumping on the altar, or cutting himself!

1. The **proposal** to come near (v. 30). An invitation to examine what he was doing. When a preacher is preaching the truth, he never fears scrutiny—He welcomes it (John 5:39; Acts

17:11). **ILLUS**: Houston mayor subpoenas pastors to submit their sermon notes.²

2. The **picture** of the altar (vs. 30-32). Altars picture devotion to God. The broken altar indicated a departure from God (cf. 19:10, 14).
 - Elijah did not build a new altar—he repaired the old altar. We don’t need a new altar—We need to repair the old altars of our dedication to God. Are there any “broken” altars in your life that needs repair? A broken testimony... Broken prayer life... Broken Bible reading/study time... Broken commitments... Broken church attendance... Broken service to God?
 - 12 stones / 12 barrels of water (vs. 33-34). Number of Israel. Elijah viewed Israel as God did—ONE NATION—not a divided nation of Israel and Judah. He was God of the entire nation.
 - Likewise, we should view things from God’s viewpoint. The church is ONE BODY—We are ONE in Christ.
3. The **preparation** of the offering (v. 33). Elijah prepared the sacrifice in order as prescribed in Leviticus 1:5-8. Everything was done “*decently and in order.*”
4. The **pouring** of the water (vs. 33-35). Elijah “stacked the deck” against God to make it clear God cannot be thwarted by any disadvantage. Elijah had already seen God provide meal in an empty barrel and raise a mother’s son from the dead. He did not act with any fear of failure, but was sure of the outcome. Elijah was confident water would pose no problem to God. It would only confirm the power of God.
 - May we realize God is bigger than any “trench” or problem, or obstacle in our path. There is nothing too hard for God (Jer. 32:17, 27). There is no circumstance or handicap that God cannot overcome. **ILLUS**: David Ring

² <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2014/10/14/city-houston-demands-pastors-turn-over-sermons/>

[**NOTE:** Three years of drought made fetching the water difficult. They had to go down from Mt. Carmel to the Mediterranean Sea to get water. Thus, the water would have been salt water. According to Leviticus 2, no sacrifice was to be made without salt.]

5. The **prayer** of the man of God (vs. 36-37). Elijah asked for four things. Elijah's four-fold request should be a pattern for every God-called preacher.
 - a) That people may know who the true God is.
 - b) That people may know you are serving God, not self. The task of a servant is to please his Master, not himself.
 - c) That people may know you are acting in accordance to the authority of God's Word.
 - d) That people's hearts may be turned to God.
6. The **proof** of the fire (vs. 38-39).
 - On Mt. Carmel, God's power was demonstrated and the people confessed, "*The Lord, he is the God.*" At Mt. Calvary, God's power was demonstrated and the centurion confessed, "*Truly this was the Son of God!*" (Mt. 27:54).

C. The **DEATH** of the false prophets (v. 40).

Imagine the scene: Fire falling from heaven... people falling on their faces... 450 false prophets running for their lives... and Elijah slaying them with a sword (19:1).

- Some find this passage difficult to accept. This was commanded in Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:2-5. These prophets had

pursuit of excellence... happiness... success... love... the good life...
peace. Not many references in pursuit of God (Mt. 5:6; Phil. 3:14)!