

**1 Kings 18:36-45 “God Wins at Mt. Carmel” May 10, 2020**  
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*1 Kings 18:36-45*

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. <sup>37</sup> Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!” <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> “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.” <sup>44</sup> 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.’” <sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

*Introduction*

Our Old Testament reading for today takes us to Mt. Carmel. (This is where caramel comes from.) Seriously, it is a mountain in a part of northern Israel jutting into the Mediterranean Sea. It was at a time when the northern kingdom of Israel was on a spiritual slide. Ahab, the king, had married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. Jezebel worshiped Baal, a pagan fertility god whose worship involved prostitution and perversion. As result King Ahab began to worship Baal. As the leaders go, so go the people of Israel. Things got so bad that Ahab and Jezebel were killing off the prophets of the true God.

Because of this idolatry God caused a drought and famine in Israel for three years. During the third year God told Elijah to meet Ahab. They did and Elijah challenged Ahab to bring the prophets of Baal and Asherah to Mt. Carmel. So, Ahab did that in the presence of many of the people of Israel. There we see:

*... the impotence of gods*

**God vs. gods** At Mt. Carmel Elijah addressed the Israelites, “How long will you waver between the two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him (v.21).” Then Elijah pointed out that things were so bad he was the only prophet of the Lord left. (Elijah knew that Obadiah had hidden 100 prophets of God to spare their lives. So, either he was emphasizing that he was the only prophet to take a public stand against Ahab and Baal, or he didn’t want to endanger the 100 prophets, or both.)

Elijah told the people to get two bulls – one for the prophets of Baal and one for Elijah. He said that each of the two sides will call upon their gods to consume their sacrifice with fire. Whichever one does, he is God.

So, the prophets of Baal called on Baal, but no answer. They shouted. They danced, but no answer. Elijah taunted them. They shouted louder and cut themselves thinking the show of blood would stir their god, but no answer. They did this stuff all day and into the evening, but no answer.

**Impotency** What happened on Mt. Carmel shows the impotence of idols. Baal couldn't hear his prophets' prayers. He couldn't consume their sacrifice. He couldn't bring them blessing. He couldn't provide peace. He couldn't give hope. He couldn't save their souls or bring eternal life. He had no power. He, like all false gods, was dead and impotent.

**Potency** Sadly while Baal could not do those things and even though he was false and not real, Baal did show a potency, a power – to deceive, confuse, and destroy. That power came from the devil. As the devil spoke through the serpent in the Garden of Eden, he speaks through the prophets of false gods to deceive and destroy. “You'll be better off if you serve me. I'll bless your flocks, your fields and your families and you'll have more fun while I'm doing it.” The worship of Baal caused Israel to waver in worship of God. It brought destruction caused by God's judgment of drought and famine.

**Application** Aren't you glad that we don't have to contend with Baal worship? I've lived in the New Ulm area going on 22 years and I have yet to see a temple or shrine to Baal or hear anyone say, “I'm a Baal worshiper.” But how many listening today are ignoring God's will concerning marriage and living together without it and don't care whether it's right or wrong because what happens in the privacy of their lives is their business? How many are addicted to pornography and refuse to turn from it? Or how many of us have those areas of life that make us like the Israelites – wavering between two opinions? One week we worship God here. The next three weeks we worship some other god. Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with fishing, camping, trips and the like, so long as it doesn't become god in our lives and so long as somewhere, sometime, somehow in our daily and weekly patterns, we are taking time for God's word, prayer and the Lord's supper when possible. However, when we allow anything or anyone to get in the way of our relationship with God, we allow it or them to become an idol that causes us, like the Israelites, to waver between two opinions. Then God loses!

Remember the devil's deception. Idols – whether ancient, like Baal, or modern like materialism, hedonism or addictions, while they may bring temporary pleasure, are built on lies. They have the power to deceive, confuse and bring destruction when they lead us to sin against the commandment, “*You shall have no other Gods.*” But they don't hear our prayers. They don't bring blessing. They don't bring joy. They don't give power. They don't save. They don't give eternal life. Don't worship them. Keep them in perspective. In these things, they lose. Mt. Carmel shows this. But this showdown spotlights for us the power of God.

### **... the power of God.**

**To Inspire Leaders** It is a power that inspires and empowers spiritual leaders. Consider Obadiah, who worked for evil king Ahab. Obadiah, at the risk of his own life, saved the lives of and supports 100 prophets of God. Consider Elijah. The Lord hid him from Ahab for a while. But when the Lord tells him to confront Ahab and Baal, Elijah steps up and steps out. He holds Ahab accountable. He calls Israel to repentance. He challenges the false-teaching prophets of Baal to show Baal's power.

There are homes, churches and communities where this kind of leadership exists – godly places with godly leaders who love their Lord, who trust in his love, who strive to follow his law. They show this in their lives. They expect others around them to do the same and give godly encouragement. They hold those around them accountable when they sin. They don't compromise God's word even when it's inconvenient or could result in ridicule or rejection. To those leaders, keep this up.

But there are some homes, churches and other places that need this leadership. If you are living in these circumstances and in a position to lead, but are shirking your responsibility, you need to get closer to God. Acknowledge your sin. Turn to God's word. Read it. Think about it. Take it to heart. In doing so, you will take in God's love in Jesus. You will experience God's power. The Holy Spirit will inspire you. Pray for God's help and courage.

**Power on Mt. Carmel**

Consider what happened when God spotlighted his power on Mt. Carmel.

When it was his turn with his sacrifice, Elijah built his altar, put the bull on it with some flour, and had the people douse it with water three times. He then prayed to God, praising him and putting his trust in God that God could and would consume this sacrifice. Suddenly fire fell from heaven consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stone altar and even the water.

But the spotlight on the power of God did not go off after this amazing miracle, this display of power. It also showed itself in the change that it affected in peoples' hearts. The Israelites saw the power of God and realized that it was connected with the word of God whom Elijah the other prophets of God proclaimed. They fell and proclaimed, "*The Lord – he is God! The Lord – he is God!*"

God also showed his power in the creation of the fist-sized cloud that rose from the sea and grew into a serious storm sending heavy rain upon the earth as well as in Elijah's running from the mountain top 20 miles to Jezreel faster than Ahab could rise in his chariot. God is powerful. He does the impossible.

**Mt. Calvary** God's display of power on Mt. Carmel reminds us of another mountain where he spotlighted his power as he consumed another sacrifice. The mountain? Calvary. The sacrifice? God's Son. On Calvary God powerfully laid on his Son, Jesus, the guilt of all sinners and caused the fire of his wrath to fall on his son. On Calvary Jesus powerfully carried that guilt and endured his Father's wrath until he, like the fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, consumed every bit of it and satisfied his Father's justice dying on the cross. That mountain shows the power of God's holiness. But it also shows the power of God's love. The Father sent the son because he loved us. God the Son sacrificed himself because he loved his Father and he loves us. The result? God's law is fulfilled and our sin is paid for. Jesus' resurrection is proof. So now we enjoy pardon and peace with God. These are ours through faith in Jesus – faith that the power of God worked in us through the Holy Spirit working in the gospel.

This power of God's love is the same power that changed hearts and would affect lives on the Israelites at Mt. Carmel. The Israelites in response to God's power not only turned from Baal to God, they also showed fruits of their repentance by follow Elijah's order to kill the prophets of Baal in keeping with God's Old Testament law in respect to false prophets..

**Application** The power of God in his law and gospel enable us to do the same with our sinful natures that cause us to waver in our love and living for God, or our standing up and leading in a godly way. Like I said before, "Get and/or stay close to God through his word". As Jesus said, "*I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5).*" God's power and love changes lives when people plug in and stay plugged in. So, stay in or plug in whichever is appropriate for you.

And like Elijah, pray. God has the power to hear and answer prayer. In that same place in John I just quoted from, Jesus also said, "*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you (Jn15:7).*" "Anything?" you ask. "Wealth, pleasure ..anything?" Anything godly. You see, if you remain in Jesus and his words remain in you, that's all you will ask for. Of course, then you will also add, "Father, if it is your will." And if it is, God will give it or God will do it, even if it's impossible. He has the power as he showed in his win at Mt. Carmel. Amen.