

Unwavering Faith

Elijah: Part 3

1 Kings 18:17-46

1. In 1 Kings 18:17-18, King Ahab confronts Elijah as the "troubler of Israel," but Elijah turns it back on Ahab for disobeying God. How do we tend to blame external circumstances, other people, or even God for trouble that actually stems from personal choices or spiritual compromises?
2. Baal was worshipped as the god of weather, fertility, and economic prosperity. What are the most common "modern Baals" in our society today (e.g., career, financial security, approval, physical appearance), and how can you tell when a good desire has become an idol in your life?
3. Elijah challenges Israel by asking, "How long will you waver between two opinions?" In what specific areas of your life are you currently tempted to "limp" between trusting Jesus and relying on worldly pursuits?
4. When Elijah asked the people to make a choice between God and Baal, scripture records that "the people said nothing." What keeps us silent or passive when we are called to take a clear stand for God in our families, workplaces, or friendships?
5. Baal's prophets engaged in frantic performative worship and even self-harm to get a response from an idol that couldn't answer. What costly tolls—emotionally, physically, or relationally—have you seen modern idols demand from people?
6. Before calling down fire, Elijah repaired the neglected altar of the Lord. What spiritual disciplines or personal practices (such as regular prayer, scripture reading, or rest) do you need to "repair" to keep your heart focused on God?
7. Elijah drenched the sacrifice and altar with water three times to eliminate any human explanation for what was about to happen. Is there a "dripping wet," humanly impossible situation in your life right now, and how can you trust God through it?
8. Contrast the hours of shouting and self-mutilation by Baal's prophets with Elijah's simple, humble prayer. How does this difference reassure you about how God desires you to approach Him in prayer?

9. After God answered by fire, Elijah prayed seven times on the mountain before seeing even a small cloud signaling rain. What ongoing prayer request in your life requires this kind of persistent, expectant faith right now?
10. Unlike false religions that require constant performance to earn favor, Jesus became our ultimate sacrifice on the cross. How does resting in Jesus' finished work shift your daily motivation from striving for approval to serving out of gratitude?

Summary

In 1 Kings 18, we come to one of the great showdowns in all of the Bible.

In chapter 17, Elijah announced to King Ahab that there would be no rain except at his word. The drought was God's judgment on Israel because the people had turned away from Him and were worshiping other gods. For around three years, Elijah had been absent from Israel. Now God was sending him back to confront Ahab, confront the prophets of Baal, and call God's people to make a choice.

The question hanging over the entire account is simple: **Who will Israel choose?**

The people had been trying to have it both ways. They wanted the LORD, but they also wanted Baal. And Elijah was about to ask them: **"How long will you waver between two opinions?"**

We Have Our Baals Too

When Ahab sees Elijah, he calls him the "troubler of Israel." But Elijah immediately turns the accusation around. Ahab and his family had abandoned the LORD's commands and led the nation into worshiping the Baals.

The word *Baal* means "lord" or "master." The primary Baal being worshiped in Israel was the Canaanite storm god, whom the people believed controlled rain and brought fertility to the land.

It can be easy to look at the Israelites and wonder how they could possibly believe these things. But put it in modern terms, and suddenly they don't seem quite so different from us.

We have our Baals too.

We may not bow down to a statue, but we can give our worship to **money, beauty, success, career, comfort, approval, relationships**, and countless other things. Anything that takes the place of God as the thing we ultimately trust, pursue, and live for can become an idol.

And many of the things that become idols aren't bad things. Career isn't bad. Family isn't bad. Relationships aren't bad. Beauty isn't bad.

The problem comes when a **good thing becomes the ultimate thing** in our lives.

Eventually, that good thing becomes a demanding thing. It demands our time, attention, energy, and sacrifice. And if we're looking to it for what only God can give, it will eventually leave us empty.

How Long Will You Waver?

At Mount Carmel, Elijah stands before the people and says:

“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” And the people say nothing.

Some translations describe it as **limping between two different opinions**—a picture of someone staggering back and forth, unable to walk decisively in one direction.

Israel hadn't completely abandoned the LORD. They were divided. They wanted the LORD, but they also wanted what they thought Baal could offer.

And that is where this passage becomes deeply personal.

We can believe in God, claim to be His follower, and still live with divided devotion. We can try to follow Jesus while holding onto something else. And a divided heart is a miserable place to be.

Elijah's question for us is the same: **How long?**

At some point, we have to decide whom we will follow.

The God Who Answers by Fire

Elijah lays out the challenge. There will be two bulls and two altars. Neither side can light the fire. Instead, each side will call upon their god.

The God who answers by fire will prove that He is the true God.

For the prophets of Baal, this must have sounded like a great deal. Baal was believed to be the god of the storm, and they were standing on Mount Carmel, a place associated with Baal worship.

Everything seemed stacked in their favor. Home-field advantage. Easy victory for Team Baal. Or so it seemed.

From morning until noon, the prophets call out, “**Baal, answer us!**” They shout and dance around the altar, but nothing happens.

Elijah begins to taunt them, telling them to shout louder. Maybe Baal is distracted. Maybe he's traveling. Maybe he's sleeping.

The point is clear: **The issue isn't that Baal won't answer. It's that Baal can't answer.**

Baal is silent because Baal is powerless.

What Are We Willing to Sacrifice?

It's easy to look at these ancient prophets and wonder how anyone could become so devoted to a false god. But before we look down on them, we need to consider what we are willing to sacrifice to our own idols.

Career can become an idol and cause us to sacrifice our marriage or neglect our children.

Family can become an idol when we expect it to carry a weight only God can carry.

Relationships can become an idol when we're more afraid of losing someone than we are of disobeying God.

Beauty can become an idol when our worth becomes tied to how we look instead of the identity we have in Jesus.

Idols always demand something from us. And when we look to them for what only God can give, they eventually leave us empty.

The Fire Falls

Now it is Elijah's turn.

He repairs the altar of the LORD that had been torn down and takes twelve stones—one for each tribe of Israel—to rebuild it.

Then he prepares the sacrifice and tells the people to pour water over it.

Not once.

Three times.

Everything is soaked, and water fills the trench around the altar.

Why?

Because Elijah wants to make absolutely certain that when the fire comes, there will be no question about where it came from.

Then Elijah prays.

No frantic performance.

He simply prays.

And then the fire falls.

“The fire of the LORD fell.”

It consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and even the water in the trench.

The contrast couldn't be clearer. Baal is powerless, but the true God, Yahweh, answers from heaven.

When the people see it, they fall facedown and cry out:

“The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

The showdown is over.

The LORD has won.

The Rain Finally Comes

After the prophets of Baal are judged, Elijah tells Ahab, **“Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.”**

Elijah sends his servant to look toward the sea. Six times, there is nothing. On the seventh time, the servant sees a cloud as small as a man's hand.

Soon the sky grows black with clouds, the wind rises, and heavy rain begins to fall.

The long drought is ending. The rain is evidence that God is restoring what had been withheld in judgment.

Ahab heads toward Jezreel in his chariot, but by the power of the LORD, Elijah runs ahead of him all the way there.

And the question hanging over Ahab is still the same:

After all you've seen today, will you still be divided?

From Mount Carmel to the Cross

That question is also the question for us.

Every one of us will worship and be committed to something or someone. We will pursue something with the hope that it will give us meaning, security, or significance.

The idols of our culture will always make promises.

But they are promises they cannot keep.

They demand our time, attention, energy, and even our lives, but they cannot give us ultimate fulfillment. And ultimately, they cannot save.

The good news of the gospel is that **the true God can satisfy and save.**

The God who made Himself known on Mount Carmel is the same God who made Himself fully known in Jesus Christ.

At Mount Carmel, following Baal meant performance and sacrifice to get the god's attention. But Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life we could never live and gave His life for us so that we would not have to earn God's acceptance.

At Mount Carmel, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. At Calvary, Jesus became our sacrifice and took the judgment of God for our sin so that we could be forgiven.

And Jesus rose from the dead so that we could have a relationship with the living God.

So How Will You Respond?

The question from Mount Carmel still stands:

How long will you waver?

Will you continue giving yourself to the things that can never satisfy and save you?

Or will you turn to Jesus and say:

He is Lord.

He is God.

He is worthy.

I will commit my life to Him.

For those who already follow Jesus, the call is to recognize that we all stumble, sin, and drift. We should be quick to confess our sin and return to following the Lord.

So ask yourself:

What is dividing your commitment to the Lord today?

Will you name it?

And then, will you pursue the Lord?

The God who answered with fire on Mount Carmel is the God who has fully revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

He is Lord. He is God. He is worthy. And He alone can satisfy and save.