

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenges 450 prophets of Baal to a contest: the God who answers by fire is the true God. The Lord sends fire from heaven.

1 Kings 18:1-46

CHARACTERS: Elijah, King Ahab, Prophets of Baal, God

THEMES: The true God, Faith, God's power

KING AHAB HAD led Israel into worship of Baal. For three years, God withheld rain as judgment. Then the Lord sent Elijah to confront Ahab.

Elijah found Ahab, who greeted him: 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?'

'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. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal.'

On the mountain, Elijah addressed the people: 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.' The people said nothing.

'I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left,' Elijah said, 'but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one, cut it in pieces, and put it on wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull. 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.'

'What you say is good,' all the people agreed.

The prophets of Baal prepared their bull and called on Baal from morning till noon. 'Baal, answer us!' But there was no response. They danced around the altar.

At noon Elijah began to taunt them. 'Shout louder! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping!'

They shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until evening. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah called the people near. He repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down, using twelve stones representing the twelve tribes. He dug a trench around it, arranged the wood, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood.

'Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood,' he said. They did it three times. The water ran down around the altar and filled the trench.

At the time of sacrifice, 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. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'

Then the fire of the Lord fell. It burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!'