

### Preparations for the Confrontation at Mount Carmel

#### 1 Kings 18:16-24

1 Kings 18:16-24 – *“So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”*

*So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.”*

*So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”*

#### Background Notes

After more than three years of no rain - a drought that Elijah had predicted – Elijah returned to the northern kingdom of Israel from the town of Zarephath in Phoenicia. Along the way he met Obadiah, who was out searching for grass for King Ahab’s horses. (Remember, by the way - the “Obadiah” in verse 16 was wicked King Ahab’s servant - not the minor prophet who wrote the book of Obadiah in the Bible.) Obadiah was a secret believer in the one true God of Israel, even though King Ahab worshiped Baal.

At Elijah’s request, Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had returned. When Ahab and Elijah met, Elijah ordered the king to assemble the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel for a religious “showdown.” All of Israel was called to assemble and observe the results. Notice – the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 false prophets of Asherah were living at government expense – *“eating at Jezebel’s table”* (v19). Asherah, by the way, was a female deity who was Baal’s “consort.” The reason for the plural “Baals” (v18) is that there were many local Baal idols.

When King Ahab, his false prophets, and all the people had gathered at Mount Carmel, Elijah proposed a test to prove who is really God: Baal, an idol - or the Lord God of Israel? Two bulls would be prepared for sacrifice and placed on two

altars. The deity who answered by sending down fire on the sacrifice would be recognized as the winner. Fair enough? The false prophets agreed, and all the people said, *"It is well spoken."* Good idea! They were anxious to get on with the contest!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The believer will be blamed for many of this world's problems.

Look at verse 17: *"Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said, 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?'"* Notice - **Elijah** got the blame for the nation's problem! The problem of no rain in the land and the resulting famine was not Elijah's fault. **Ahab** and **Israel** had departed from the Lord. **They** were involved in idolatry and immorality. **They** were the problem. But they shifted the blame to Elijah.

Notice, by the way, that the blame was not shifted to Obadiah, a secret believer. The Obadiahs never get blamed! It's the Elijahs who get blamed - the courageous believers who are willing to stand up for what's right and denounce what's wrong. You can be sure that the outspoken believer will have the blame shifted to him whenever it's convenient.

It is not unusual for believers to be blamed for many of this world's problems. Roman emperor Nero blamed the early Christians for the great fire in Rome, and Christians were persecuted as a result. Christians today are blamed for "holding up progress." So-called progressives opine, "If only those conservative Christians could be removed, our problems would be solved. They hold up society's progress with their obsolete moral standards and convictions." Sound familiar? The believer will be blamed for many of this world's problems.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus said, *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:11-12). You can be sure that as it was in the time of the prophets, so it is now.

But - it's great to know that there is a reward for hanging in there when you're falsely accused, so don't get discouraged, and don't give up! Remember - the believer will be unjustly blamed for many of this world's problems.

### 2. The unbeliever should be confronted.

Too often we let unbelievers get away without truly confronting them. We present the gospel with a "take it or leave it" attitude. That's not the way the apostle Paul preached to the unbelievers in Athens. He said to the unbelievers there that God **commands** - not invites, but **commands** - all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). He confronted the unbeliever.

Elijah confronted unbelieving Ahab. He confronted the unbelieving people of Israel. He confronted the unbelieving false prophets. Elijah did not let Ahab get away with his false statement nor did he allow Ahab to shift the blame. When King Ahab said, *“Is that you, you torubler of Israel?”* (v17), Elijah confronted Ahab. In verse 18 Elijah said, *“I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals.”*

Elijah confronted the unbelieving people with the challenge of verse 21. *“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”* Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal. Put up or shut up! Let Baal answer by fire!

The unbeliever should be confronted. Jude 3 tells us to **contend earnestly** for the faith. This means we need to do more than just tell the unbeliever, “God loves you.” It will sometimes include confrontation. The unbeliever should be confronted.

### **3. The truth is not determined by numbers, or by “home court advantage.”**

The false prophets of Baal had the advantage. 450 prophets of Baal to 1 Elijah. Maybe the prophets of Asherah were there as well. The false prophets certainly had the advantage of numbers.

And they certainly had the “home court advantage.” Mount Carmel is in the north, far from Jerusalem, and not far from Phoenicia, Jezebel’s home territory. All the false prophets had come from Phoenicia. The false prophets certainly had the home court advantage. But truth is not determined by numbers - or by home court advantage!

A lot of people today determine truth either by numbers and home court advantage - or both! For example, a lot of people think the theory of evolution must be true. After all, they say, “most scientists” believe in evolution, and they ought to know. They’re the “experts”! But truth is not determined by numbers or home court advantage. Truth is determined from the Word of God.

I once saw a TV talk show where the audience was asked to vote by applause whether they thought God existed or not. What kind of “truth determination method” is that? What a ridiculous idea! The Word of God is the standard for truth.

Truth is not decided by numbers - or home court advantage! And that truth is certainly taught in this portion of God’s Word.

## Practical Application

### How long will you hesitate between two opinions?

*“And Elijah came to all the people and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word.”* There’s our practical application: *“How long will you hesitate between two opinions?”*

Elijah asked these on-the-fence people, “How long will you falter, or waver, or hesitate, between two opinions?” You see, many of the people gathered at Mount Carmel were not Baal worshipers. By profession, they were God’s people - but many of them had stopped following the Lord. They were either doing nothing, or they were lukewarm, or they were undecided.

So Elijah challenged them. *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”* But the people answered him not a word. The people were silent. *“But the people answered him not a word.”* They were silent because they were convicted. They didn’t have a good answer.

Is it possible that you are in that situation today? You’re undecided. You’re wavering. You’re lukewarm. You’ve professed to be a Christian but there’s no real commitment in your life. You want to escape the judgment of sin - but at the same time you want to enjoy the pleasures of sin. You want to follow Jesus - but you’re afraid your friends will reject you. How long will you hesitate between two opinions?

Maybe you’re a Christian, but you’re wavering, hesitating between two opinions. You want to receive a reward in Heaven - but you’re hung up with riches on earth. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “You cannot serve God and money.” How long will you waver between two opinions?

Revelation 2:16 says that the Lord will not tolerate those who are lukewarm. How long will you hesitate between two opinions? As Joshua said to the people of Israel in his day, *“Choose for yourself this day whom you will serve! ...As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!”* (Joshua 24:15).

How long will you hesitate between two opinions?