

The Prophets of Baal

1 Kings 18:25-29

1 Kings 18:25-29 - *“Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.”*

So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us!” But there was no voice; no one answered.

Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”

Background Notes

This is certainly a dramatic passage of Scripture! However, it's very interesting to see and to notice that the Spirit of God did not play up the drama even more, as we would do if we were writing this exciting chapter of the Bible!

If we were writing up this event, we would describe the setting of Mount Carmel - that majestic mountain ridge that juts out into the beautiful blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. We would describe the prophets of Baal in vivid detail, with their colorful pagan emblems and dress. We would describe the dramatic arrival of King Ahab and his entourage of royal servants.

And then we would describe the contrast: the godly prophet Elijah dressed in a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt. Standing alone, but confident and courageous! Isn't it interesting that the Bible bypasses these dramatic features and focuses our attention on the important points? The important points are the failure of Baal to answer, and how this paved the way for God's dramatic answer.

It looks like the prophets of Baal tried to “awake” their god for at least six hours, from morning to three in the afternoon. *“And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” (v29)*. Three in the afternoon was the time of the evening sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, where the worship of the true God continued. So it seems that the prophets of Baal tried for at least six hours, and maybe longer, to get Baal to answer!

Notice the emphasis on Baal's failure to answer in verses 26 and 29. *"They called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered"(v26). And verse 29: "And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention."* Certainly there's an emphasis on the failure of Baal to answer!

The false prophets of Baal really believed that Baal would answer. After all, in their religious dogma Baal was "the lord of heaven." He controlled the thunder. He controlled the lightning. Certainly he could start a fire. And I dare say that these prophets of Baal, with their demonic connections, had been able to start fires before. In fact, I'm convinced they'd been able to start fires before! So they were convinced that Baal would answer, and he would send fire on their sacrifice.

But not this time! God made sure of that this time there would be no answer!

Doctrinal Points

1. There is a time for holy ridicule.

Verse 27 - *"And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.'"*

That's great, isn't it? Think of Elijah mocking out these false prophets of Baal! I wouldn't be surprised if the watching people of Israel laughed and applauded at this point. It certainly drove the false prophets to continue to cry aloud. They even cut themselves to attract Baal's attention. *"So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them."* But there was no answer.

There is a time for holy ridicule. Not often, but sometimes. Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time for everything, and that certainly would include a time for holy ridicule. Those times are rare, but there is a time for holy ridicule.

Here's an illustration: One Saturday afternoon I was playing golf with one of my students and his father, who was also a Christian. The golf course was crowded. Because of the slow pace, at every tee we were stuck, waiting behind a very obnoxious foursome ahead of us. The four men were speaking in loud voices, using foul language and telling each other very lewd jokes. And of course they were laughing loudly.

All three of us were wondering what to do. My student was thinking he should say something to make a good impression on his Christian college professor! I was thinking I should say something, because I was there as the preacher/teacher type. My student's father was thinking that he should say something as the elder statesman, or perhaps because it was his hometown course. So there we were, wondering what we should do. Finally, the Christian father came up with the perfect comment. He turned to me, and in a voice loud enough for the four men to hear, he said "You know, Dave, some people will laugh and joke all the way to hell." You could have heard a pin drop on that golf tee.

That was holy ridicule! Perfect timing! That was a time for holy ridicule. So there ***is*** a time for holy ridicule. Not often. It's rare. But there is a time.

2. Sincerity is not salvation.

There are a lot people today who think if they believe in what they believe ***sincerely enough***, they will merit salvation. That's certainly ***not*** what the Bible teaches. The prophets of Baal were very sincere in what they believed, but they were ***sincerely mistaken***.

Sincerity is not salvation. All roads do not lead up the same mountain to God. Apart from Christ, all roads lead to hell.

Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* And in John 14:6, the Lord Jesus said, *"I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No one comes to God but through me."*

Sincerity is not salvation. These prophets of Baal were sincere enough. They really thought Baal would answer, but sincerity is not salvation.

3. Religious zeal and fervor are not the key.

Again, some people today are convinced that if they show enough ***religious zeal***, and if they have enough religious fervor, somehow that's the key for making it with God. But that is ***not*** what the Bible teaches.

The prophets of Baal had lots of zeal, and they demonstrated lots of religious fervor. *"They called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!"* (Maybe they were singing, "Come on Baal, light my fire"? *[Laughter]*)

Look at verse 28, *"So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them."* Talk about religious zeal and fervor! We can't say these folks were not zealous. We can't say they didn't have a lot of fervor. But religious zeal and fervor are not the key.

God is not opposed to zeal, and He's not oppose to religious fervor. Religious zeal and fervor are good - ***when they are based on faith in the one and only true God***. But zeal and fervor in themselves - or on the wrong basis - they accomplish nothing. Religious zeal and fervor are not the key to salvation.

Practical Application

Idols will not answer you in your time of need.

If ever there was a time that these prophets of Baal needed their god to answer, it was there on Mount Carmel. For more than six hours of ecstatic frenzy, they called on the name of Baal. *“From morning even till noon, saying “O Baal, hear us.”* But there was no reply, and there was no fire.

They were exhausted and discouraged, but they wouldn't give up. *“So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.”* But there was no answer. The heavens were silent. Idols will not answer you in your time of need.

Obviously this applies to every non-Christian, no matter what kind of idols they're chasing after. Power, money, pleasure, possessions? Those idols will not help them in time of need. When they stand before God, those earthly idols will be silent. Idols will not answer you in time of need.

But this application is for Christians as well. 1 John 5:21 is addressed to Christians: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* ***Anything that takes priority over God in our lives is an idol.***

We may **say** that the Lord is #1 in our lives, but is He **really #1**?

Some time ago a dying Christian man told me, with great emotion, that he wished he had not given money such a priority in his life. He confessed to me that he had not always been ethical when it came to the use of money. He knew he would soon be facing the Lord, and the Lord would judge or review his life. His salvation was settled already, because he was a true believer. But his life would be reviewed, as to reward. And he realized he would get little reward from the Lord, because during his life as a believer he had made money an idol.

The judgment seat of Christ for believers could be looked on as a time of need - particularly for Christians who have served too many idols in their life on earth. This man realized that he could lose out on reward because he had worshiped money as an idol in his earthly life.

What about the idol of money - or other idols - in **our** lives? Idols will not answer you in your time of need.