

The Lord Answers Elijah's Prayer with Fire from Heaven

1 Kings 18:30-40

1 Kings 18:30-40 - *"Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.*

And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there."

Background Notes

1 Kings 18:30-40 continues of the great confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, describing that amazing and spectacular event when the fire of the Lord fell from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice - in answer to Elijah's prayer!

We've seen that the prophets of Baal were not able to meet Elijah's challenge. Their false god Baal failed to answer their "prayers" with fire. In spite of their ranting and raving, ecstatic frenzy, and cutting themselves, Baal was silent.

Now it was Elijah's turn. First he repaired the altar of the Lord. This altar had probably been built by godly people of the northern kingdom of Israel after Jeroboam I set up the golden calf idols in Dan and Bethel. He prevented worshipers of the God of Israel from making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where true worship of the Lord took place at the Temple. This broken altar had probably been torn down by Jezebel, because she did everything she could to purge the whole land of worship of the true God of Israel.

The twelve stones (v32) represented the unity of the Hebrew people in God's eyes. Although the twelve tribes were politically divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, yet God still saw them as one people.

Obviously, Elijah poured all that water over the sacrifice and the altar to prove that no tricks were involved. (No "hidden match" trick!) Where did Elijah get all that water? After all, there was a terrible drought. One possible source is the Mediterranean Sea, because Mount Carmel is on the Mediterranean. Another possibility is a nearby spring. Some springs may not have completely dried up.

After the Lord answered Elijah's prayer with an amazing display of fire from Heaven, Elijah ordered all the prophets of Baal to be seized. Not even one was allowed to escape! So the people seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon. There he executed all those prophets of Baal.

Do you think Elijah should have been a little more gracious? Wouldn't it have been more loving and merciful to send those prophets to some kind of doctrinal rehabilitation course? **No!** Elijah was acting in line with God's Law!

Under the Law, all false prophets were to be killed, because God did not want His people to be polluted with paganism. There are lots of passages in the Law that speak to this. Here's just one verse: *"The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die"* (Deuteronomy 18:20). So Elijah was right to put these prophets of Baal to death, showing no mercy. This was God's Law.

Doctrinal Points

1. Public prayer does not have to be long to be effective.

Sometimes we get the idea that public prayers have to be long and use all kinds of flowery religious language. Not so! Look at Elijah's prayer: *"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again"* (v36-37). Not a long prayer – about 15 seconds long- but it was to the point, and it was very effective!

What a contrast to the prayers of the false prophets of Baal. From morning to noon they "prayed" to their lifeless god. For at least six hours they worked themselves into an ecstatic frenzy. They ranted and raved, and mutilated themselves with knives and spears. **But there was no answer.**

Why weren't their prayers answered? Well it's obvious! They were praying to a lifeless god! When you're praying to the right God - the living God, the only God - your prayers don't have to be long to be effective.

Some of you may be reluctant to pray aloud in the presence of others because you think you have to pray long prayers in "religious" language. No! Prayers don't have to be long to be effective. At Emmaus Bible College, we always begin our classes with prayer. Some of my students are reluctant to pray, and I never force a student to pray aloud. But I encourage them, saying that they need to offer only a brief prayer. You don't need long prayers to be effective!

1 Timothy 2:8 says that God wants men to pray publicly, in worship and in other areas. Some of us men need to take this doctrinal point seriously. We need to be motivated to pray in public. So let this doctrinal point be an encouragement to all of us. Public prayer does not have to be long to be effective!

2. The fire of the Lord must fall before the refreshing rains can come.

When we come to the end of chapter 18, the rains returned. But before the refreshing rains could come, the fire of the Lord had to fall on the sacrifice. Why didn't Elijah challenge Baal's prophets to see which "god" could produce rain? Why was it a test of who could bring fire? One reason is that this test is a wonderful picture of Calvary. Verse 29 emphasizes this. The fire of the Lord fell on Elijah's sacrifice at the time of the evening sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. And as the fire of the Lord fell on the sacrifice, so the fire of God's judgment fell on Christ at the cross.

I believe the mercy of God is also seen here, in the fact that the fire fell on the sacrifice - not on the people! Aren't you glad that the fire of God's judgment fell on Jesus Christ at the cross - and not on us?

So this great miracle in Elijah's time is a wonderful picture of Calvary. As a result of the work of Christ on the cross for us, we now can have the refreshing rains of the Holy Spirit. I think that is part of the spiritual picture that God has given us. In John 7:38-39 the Lord Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*" But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." Because the fire of the Lord's judgment fell on the Lord Jesus at the cross, the refreshing rains of the Holy Spirit have come.

Practical Application

Let's repair the altars of the Lord!

The altar that Elijah repaired should not have existed. Once the people of Israel entered the Land, God's Law said that all sacrifices were to take place **only** at the Temple in Jerusalem - not just anyplace in the Land. As we mentioned, most

likely this altar was built after Jeroboam I set up the two golden calf shrines, and tried to keep the people from going south to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

So it seems that the godly people built this altar to enable worship of the Lord in the northern kingdom. Their motives were good, but this altar was not ideal. Sacrifice to the Lord was to take place **only** in Jerusalem. But now Elijah was repairing this “un-ideal” altar! And notice - he said he was doing this at the word of the Lord (v16). In other words, God wanted this altar repaired - even though it was not an ideal set up.

God wants us to do the same. Let’s repair the altars of the Lord - even though we may not be able to attain to the ideal. What do I mean? “Altars of the Lord” speak of testimonies to the Lord, and worship of the Lord. When we look around our home churches, we’ll see things that are not ideal and maybe not perfectly in line with Scripture. So what do we do? Well, we don’t tear down the testimonies of the Lord - even though they may be partly in ruin.

Most of us have been around long enough to realize that no church or ministry is perfect! So, before the Lord, what are we supposed to do? We don’t quit and walk away. We pitch in and repair - even though we may never attain the “ideal.” Yes, there may be a time when we decide to put our efforts into building up other altars of the Lord. And there are cases where the altar of the Lord is no longer an altar to the Lord at all. But normally when an altar of the Lord is in disrepair, we work to repair it. We build it up, even though we know it may not be completely perfect.

I believe we have a wonderful example in our Lord Jesus. As you know, our Lord went to the Temple in Jerusalem in accordance with the Jewish Law, even though the situation there was **far from ideal!** Much of that Temple was built by the evil king, Herod the Great – who was anything but a godly believer. The Ark of the Covenant was no longer there. Hypocritical religious leaders and corrupt moneychangers populated the Temple courts. Some ultra-Orthodox Jews, like the Essenes, would have nothing to do with that Temple. They lived in the wilderness rather than have anything to do with “Herod’s Temple.”

But our Lord did not walk out. He cleansed the Temple courts. He continued to worship and teach at this “un-ideal” house of the Lord. He even called the Temple, **“My Father’s house”!** Can you believe it – he called the Temple built by wicked Herod, **“My Father’s house”!** What a model for us to follow! Let’s repair the altars of the Lord!