



# Fire from Heaven

Eight Studies in the Life of Elijah  
from 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2  
by **Peter J Blackburn**

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## 4. A Test of Faith and a Call to Integrity

**Bible Reference: 1 Kings 18.20-46**

**Read: 1 Kings 18.20-24.**

There were 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah had Ahab summon them together with all the people to Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18.19-20).



Elijah called the people to **truth** and **integrity**. “*How much longer will it take you to make up your minds? If the Lord is God, worship him; but if Baal is God, then worship him*” (v. 21). They had a religion of convenience in which they followed whichever of the two beliefs suited them for the moment. Elijah was saying that they had to know the **truth** – whether the Lord or Baal is God – and **live accordingly** – follow him.

### **Reflect:**

- In what ways today do the same questions of truth and integrity present themselves to us?
- In what ways are we tempted to believe in the Lord and yet follow Baal?

### **The Test of Truth**

**Read: 1 Kings 18.25-40.**

Elijah was grossly outnumbered – only one remaining prophet of the Lord over against 450 prophets of Baal. Two bulls were to be

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## **5. Quiet Stillness on Sinai.** Bible Reference: 1 Kings 19.

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prepared for sacrifice (the prophets of Baal were to be given the choice, v. 23). There was to be wood, but no fire. The prophets of Baal would pray to their God and Elijah would pray to the Lord – “and the one who answers by sending fire – he is God” (v.24). The people, silent when Elijah called them to truth and integrity (v. 21), now shouted their approval.

Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to offer their sacrifice first. Their ritual and incantation brought no response (vv. 26-29).

Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down, dug a trench around it, prepared the sacrifice, then had it all thoroughly drenched with water. (Mount Carmel, remember, was quite close to the sea. Ample supplies of sea water were freely available.) Clearly Elijah was expecting the Lord to answer by fire (vv. 30-35)!

“At the hour of the afternoon sacrifice” (v. 36) suggests restoration of the usual time of worship.

The prayer of Elijah called on the Lord to reveal himself to his people and to vindicate his prophet. But his prayer is not just for fire, but for the people to know the truth about God and to turn back to him – truth and integrity (vv. 36-37).

“The fire of the Lord fell” (v. 38). What happened was no little flicker, but a dramatic demonstration of the presence and power of God visible to all the assembled people. The immediate reaction of the people was to acknowledge the truth – “The Lord is God; the Lord alone is God!” – and to prostrate themselves in worship (v. 39). The

There is an old tradition (quoted by Ephraem Syrus and John Chrysostom in the fourth century AD) that the prophets of Baal made their altar hollow. Their purpose was to hide one of their number so that he could light the wood. The gullible crowd would, they hoped, believe that Baal had set the sacrifice on fire. If there ever was such a plot, it failed!

There is no Biblical support for this tradition, except perhaps in the actions of Elijah himself. Elijah seemed to be very particular to ensure that there could be no suspicion of that sort of deception in his own actions.

people were moved into action immediately to eliminate all the prophets of Baal (v. 40).

#### **Reflect:**

- Was this an excessive and unnecessary impulsive reaction, or was it the exacting of a justified retribution?
- Are there any ways in which it is appropriate for us today to seek to eliminate opposition to the truth?
- Reflect on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5.43-48. What are the factors which make our situation (and appropriate reactions) different from Elijah’s?

### **The Drought is Over**

**Read: 1 Kings 18.41-46.**

There were still no clouds in the sky, but Elijah had confidence that the God who had answered by fire would now answer with rain for the thirsty ground. With “*the roar of rain approaching*” only in his head, he announced to Ahab the end of the drought. When at last there was “*a little cloud no bigger than a man’s hand*”, he told Ahab he had better get going or his chariot would get bogged (vv. 41-46).