

Elijah Confronts Ahab

Key Verse: “[Elijah] answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.”
—I Kings 18:18

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 18:1-40

Israel began at a most crucial time. The nation was divided into two parts: the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. On the throne of the latter sat King Ahab, but he was greatly influenced by his wife, Jezebel, a former Phoenician princess. (I Kings 16:31) As a result of her influence, the worship of Baal, the chief god of the Phoenicians, spread quickly among the Israelites. Because of this idolatry, God determined to bring a drought upon the land as punishment to Israel.
—I Kings 16:30-33; 17:1

God wonderfully suits men, in this case, Elijah, to the work he designs for them. Elijah’s declaration of the famine on behalf of God was a bold challenge to Ahab. Baal was a heathen god responsible for rain, thunder, lightning and dew. When Elijah announced the drought, he not only challenged Baal, but also king Ahab, his wife Jezebel, their priests, and the people of Israel.

In the third year of the famine God told Elijah to confront Ahab. By this time, the king had recognized that the famine was God’s punishment, yet he still wavered between right and wrong. It was Elijah’s task to have the king and all the people see their evil ways and cause them

to return to God with their whole hearts.—I Kings 18:1-16

When they met, Ahab asked Elijah, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (vs. 17) Elijah’s answer, found in our Key Verse, rightly shifted the responsibility back to Ahab and his ruling house. What followed is one of the most dramatic events recorded in Scripture, a challenge pitting Jehovah, the God of Israel, and Baal, the god of Phoenicia and Canaan.

In this challenge, Elijah was the agent of Jehovah, and four hundred fifty of Queen Jezebel’s priests were the representatives of Baal. Two altars were built, and two bullocks were selected by the prophets of Baal. One bullock was to be placed on each altar to be sacrificed to the two gods. Whichever god would answer by consuming the sacrifice with fire would be designated the true God. The proposition was so fair that the prophets of Baal could not refuse it. (vss. 22-24) Before the test began, Elijah spoke to the Israelites, as a disappointed father might speak to a child: “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”—vs. 21, *New International Version*

The result was one-sided, as shown in verses 25-38 of our lesson. The evil prophets called upon Baal to set fire to their bullock, but nothing happened. After their failure, Elijah took twelve stones from the altar to Jehovah which had previously been torn down, and built a new altar, upon which he placed his bullock. He dug a trench around it and had water poured over the entire altar three times, filling the trench. Elijah called upon Jehovah to show the people that he was the only true God. Immediately the bullock, wood, stones, and water were all consumed by fire from above.

How blessed it is to know that Jehovah is the one “true God, he is the living God.” (Jer. 10:10) We look forward to the time when all people will recognize this and be “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”—I Thess. 1:9 ■