

## Session 4

August 15, 2021

### SERVE WITH LOYALTY

#### 1 Kings 18:20-26, 31-39

Without a doubt, the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal facing off on Mount Carmel is one of the greatest in all the Bible. All of the struggles, miracles, and confrontations that Elijah had faced to this point had prepared him for his greatest challenge.

Earlier in the chapter, Elijah was commanded by God to pay King Ahab another visit. Three and a half years had passed (see James 5: 17) and the drought had taken its toll. Ahab, who hardly paid attention to the strange prophet at his first visit, certainly paid attention now! (see v. 17). A day of reckoning had arrived. The drama that followed can be seen in two main acts.

**Scene 1: An honest contest (vv. 19-24).** In verse 19, we see the *participants*. *All Israel* means the leaders and representatives of God's people. The four hundred and fifty *prophets of Baal* were those pagan priests who taught a false religion worshipping the false god of fertility and filth. The four hundred *prophets of Asherah* were those pagan priests who attended the various altars and high places set up by wicked Queen Jezebel. Those eight hundred and fifty false prophets and pagan priests, all sponsored and supported by Jezebel, gathered on one side of the contest. On the other, stood one man: Elijah. But Elijah is the prophet of the one true God. The rain stopped...at his word. The flour and oil flowed...at his word. The dead son was raised...at his word. And on Mount Carmel, the enemies of God were called out and assembled...at his word (v. 20). In verse 21 we see the *plea*. Like Joshua so many years before (see Josh. 24:15), Elijah challenged the people: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him." In verses 23-24, we see the *plan*. The pagan priests could not argue. The contest was both logical and nicely tilted in their favor. Since Baal was the nature god, and the god of the sun, he was the god of heat and flame and lightning. He could certainly send down fire from heaven. Even those leaders of Israel who hung their heads in silence a moment ago (see verse 21) applauded the idea. "It is well spoken" (v. 24) meant the contest was legitimate.

**Scene 2: A heavenly conquest (vv. 25-39).** Since their side was so many, they got to go first. They got set up (v. 25), then were let down (v. 26). They got stirred up in verse 27, then really fired up in verse 28. But in the end, everything came crashing down (v. 29). Then it was Elijah's turn. In verses 30-33, the man of God prepared the altar of God. Then the people of God saturated the altar of God (vv. 33-35). In verses 36-37, the man of God offered his prayer to God, and in verse 38, the fire of God fell in response. In verse 39, Israel again became the people of God, and in the end, the enemies of God were slain by the man of God! (v. 40).

For reflection: *What kinds of experiences prepared Elijah for this confrontation? Do you think these kinds of contests (sometimes called "power encounters") are legitimate today? Why or why not?*