

## Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson

1 Kings 18: 20 - 46

Last week we were at the point when Elijah told King Ahab to bring the Prophets of Baal and Asherah to Mount Carmel along with all the people. This done Elijah then takes control of the situation.

Elijah would take an Ox and kill it as a sacrifice. He would lay it on pieces of wood without starting any fire and the 450 prophets of the Baal would do the same. He would pray to God, and they would pray to their gods to set the wood on fire. They would see who was the one true God. And the people agreed.

From early morning 'till noon the people ranted and raved and called upon Baal to answer their prayers. Leaping around the altar to no avail. At noon Elijah mocked them "Call louder for he is a God. Either he is occupied or gone to the toilet or maybe he has gone on a journey or maybe he is sleeping and needs to be awakened!" This caused the prophets to become incensed and cry out all the louder.

They cut themselves according to their custom, with swords and lances until their blood gushed out, a practice that was expressly forbidden under the Mosaic law.

They continued in vain, until the evening sacrifice but no one answered and no one paid attention. The Elijah said to the people "Come near me".

So all the people came near to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. (It is possible that the altar had been built by people of the Northern ten tribes after the division of the kingdom and that it had been destroyed by the agents of Jezebel.)

Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob by doing this he called attention to the covenant unity of Israel as the people of God in spite of her political division. What was about to happen concerned the entire nation, not just the northern ten tribes.

So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and dug a trench around it large enough to hold two measure of seed which in liquid is about 26pints or fifteen litres.

He then arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. Elijah then said "Fill four large jars or pitchers with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood and he said do it a second and a third time. The water flowed around the altar saturating everything and running down filled the trench. In total there were 12 large pitchers filled with water.

At the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah prays to god saying "Oh Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel Let it be know that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command" "Answer me, Oh Lord answer me that these people may know that your are God and that you have turned their hearts back to you again."

With that the Lord caused fire to come down from heaven that burnt up not only the sacrifice but the wood, the stones and the soil and also evaporated the water in the trench. When the people saw it they fell on their faces and said "The Lord He is God! The Lord He is God."

Elijah told the people to seize the prophets of Baal and not let any of them get away. He had them brought down to the Kishon valley where they were slaughtered.

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Elijah said to Ahab "Go eat and drink for there is the sound of heavy rain." Elijah went back up Mount Carmel and crouching down put his head between his knees. He said to his servant go and look toward the sea. The servant went and came back and said there was nothing there. Seven times Elijah repeated his command and on the seventh time the servant reported there was a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea. Elijah said to his servant go down and tell Ahab, hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.

In a little while the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose and a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to the city Jezreel. Jezreel was situated about fifty five miles north of Jerusalem. Here the king's of Israel had a palace and the court often resided there. (2 Samuel 2:8-9) In or near the town was a temple of Baal and of Asherah.

The palace of Ahab was on the eastern side of the city forming part of the city wall. The palace of Jezebel was on the city wall with windows facing east. Then the hand of the lord was on Elijah and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel. Elijah ran the six miles back to the city in order to give Ahab a last chance to turn from his sin before joining Jezebel in Jezreel. His run also ensured that the correct story of what happened would reach the town of Jezreel.

Next week we will hear Jezebel's re-action.