

A Bible Adventure

Edition 02

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Fire from Heaven

A retelling of 1 Kings 18:1–45

Three years had passed since the prophet Elijah stood in King Ahab's court and announced the coming of the great drought. He had spent part of that time by the brook Cherith and part of it with the widow of Zarephath. Many times during those long days, he must have wondered what God was planning to do next for His people. Had the people of Israel learned their lesson yet? Were they ready to turn from their idols? Someday the Lord would end the drought—but how and when?

“Go, show yourself to Ahab,” the Lord said to Elijah. “And I will send rain to the earth.”

Elijah set out at once for Samaria, two hundred and fifty kilometers to the south of Zarephath. On the way, he met Obadiah, the governor of King Ahab's house, who was seeking pasture for the surviving horses and mules. Obadiah was one of the few leaders who remained loyal to the God of heaven, and he had courageously shown his loyalty by hiding and feeding a hundred of God's prophets in caves when Queen Jezebel had tried to kill them.

Recognizing Elijah, he dropped to his knees. “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?” he cried.

“It is,” said Elijah. “Go and tell King Ahab that Elijah is here.”

“I cannot,” said Obadiah. “King Ahab has been searching everywhere for you. There have been many false reports as to where you have been seen, and these reports have only further enraged the king. Now if I tell King Ahab you are here and he finds out that you have disappeared again, he will kill me.”

“As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand,” said Elijah, “I will surely show myself to him today.”

Obadiah believed him, and rode off to find the king. Upon hearing the news, King Ahab went at once to the place where his servant had said he would find Elijah. The prophet was still there. “Are you the one who troubles Israel?” King Ahab demanded as he drew his horse close to Elijah.

Interested in more about Elijah?
Then don't miss “Make Me a Cake”
for another story on the prophet Elijah's life.

“I have not troubled Israel,” Elijah unflinchingly replied, “it is *you* and your father’s house that have done so through forsaking the commandments of God and following Baal. Now, gather all of Israel to Mount Carmel to meet me there, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table, also.”

God had shown Elijah a plan. It was time for a confrontation. The people were going to have to decide once and for all whether they were going to serve the God of heaven or the false gods, whose idols had been set up all over the land. So the king sent out messengers, calling the people to assemble at Mount Carmel.

Soon thousands of men, women, and children were streaming toward the place of meeting. None of them were sure why they were going there, only that the king had ordered them to do so. Rumor had it that Elijah was going to be there, but nobody believed it. During the past three years, similar tales had circulated about the prophet, yet he had never made an appearance. Had not the king himself been looking for him all this time?

Pushing and jostling one another, the people trudged and stumbled toward the top of Mount Carmel until they covered the slopes and stayed all night long, awaiting the dawn.

Early in the morning, somebody cried, “There he

is! I can see him! Elijah is here!”

The news swept through the waiting throng, and men and women strained to see the man who had dared to defy the king, while boys and girls shoved their way to the front to get a better view.

“Hush!” someone cried. “Hush! He’s speaking. Elijah is speaking.”

Silence fell upon the crowd. Then from the mountaintop boomed that powerful voice once heard in King Ahab’s court.

“How long halt you between two opinions?” cried the prophet. “If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal be god, then follow him!”

No one spoke.

Elijah continued, “I alone remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty. Give us two bullocks, and let the prophets of Baal choose one for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire underneath, and I will do the same with the other bullock. The prophets of Baal may call on Baal, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God that answers with fire, let him be God.”

“Well said. That’s fair enough,” the people responded, thrilled that they were to see such a test of the powers of rival gods. From now on, they watched and listened with tenfold interest.

“Choose one bullock for yourselves,” Elijah said, turning to the prophets of Baal. “Dress it first, and then call on the name of your gods to send fire.”

Glad for the chance to prove that Baal was the greatest god on earth, his prophets seized their bullock, cut it up, and placed the prepared pieces on the altar they had built. Then they began to implore their god to send fire to burn the sacrifice.

“O Baal, hear us!” they cried, and began to leap around the altar. “O Baal, hear us!”

Still no fire came, nor any word from Baal.

All morning long, they kept dancing and shouting in a frenzy. At noon, Elijah mocked them, and said, “Cry louder! Perhaps he is away on a journey, or he is merely sleeping and must be woken.”

Upon hearing this, they cried still louder and began to cut themselves with knives until

they bled. Midday passed, afternoon came, and then the sun began to sink. Still Baal had not answered.

Presently Elijah spoke again to the people, who were no doubt tired and disappointed in the failure of the prophets of Baal.

“Come near to me!” he cried, and the crowd surged forward. Then they watched him repair the forgotten altar of the Lord that had once stood upon this mountaintop but had been broken down.

Taking twelve stones, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, he rebuilt the altar, and then dug a trench around it. Next, he cut the bullock in pieces and laid it on the wood.

“Fill four barrels with water and pour it on the sacrifice and on the wood,” he said to everybody’s surprise.

Some probably laughed and said, “Does he expect it to burn, with all that water on it?” But if Elijah heard, he took no notice.

“Do it a second time,” he said, and they did.

“Do it a third time,” he said, and the sacrifice was soaked again until water poured into the trench and filled it. Now nobody could say he set fire to the sacrifice himself.

Suddenly a hush fell over the assembly as Elijah raised his voice in prayer. Everybody listened, even the prophets of Baal, who had ceased their shouting.

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel,” he cried. “Let

it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that 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!”

Scarcely had Elijah finished praying when flames flashed from the sky and consumed and burned the sacrifice, along with the wood, the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. It was a marvelous, never-to-be-forgotten sight!

Terrified, the people fell on their faces, crying, “The Lord, He is the God! The Lord, He is the God!”

Elijah then commanded the people to capture the prophets of Baal and he led them to the brook Kishon, where he himself slew them all in order to purge the land of their wickedness.

Then, after Elijah had instructed King Ahab to prepare for rain, he climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed in prayer.

“Go and look toward the sea,” he said to his servant.

“There is nothing,” his servant said upon his return.

“Go again.” He said this seven times.

At the seventh time, the servant returned and said, “Look! A cloud is arising out of the sea, as small as a man’s hand!”

Before long, the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and a great rain fell in answer to Elijah’s persistent prayer.

See “Heroes of the Bible: Elijah” for more on this fascinating Bible character.