



The Battle of the Gods

Key Point

Israel's integration of Baal worship with the worship of Yahweh was sinful. Idolatry is a contemporary challenge in our church and societal culture, deceiving us into seeking other sources of satisfaction.

Scripture

1 Kings 18:1–40

Context and the Story

God sent Elijah to confront the duplicity of the nation of Israel in their worship of Baal and Jehovah. His name, Elijah, meaning "My God is Yahweh," is a name appropriate for him because of his challenge to Baal worship. Baal was the local nature deity responsible for rain, thunder, lightning, and dew. Elijah's pronouncement that no rain would fall until he says so was the basis for King Ahab's desire to hunt him down and eliminate his voice.

When Ahab confronts Elijah, he refers to him as the "troubler of Israel." Elijah responds by throwing the charge back at Ahab, saying that it is Ahab who has troubled Israel by allowing the worship of false gods. Elijah then berates both the people of Israel and Ahab for their acceptance and participation in Baal worship. "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). And the people were silent.

At this point Elijah proposes a test of the powers of Baal and the God of Israel. The people of Israel, 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of Asherah are summoned to Mount Carmel. Two altars are built, one for Baal and one for the God of Israel. Wood is laid on the altars. Two oxen are slaughtered and cut into pieces; the pieces are laid on the wood. Elijah then invites the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. They pray from morning to noon without success. Elijah ridicules their efforts. They respond by cutting themselves and adding their own blood to the sacrifice. They continue praying until evening without success.

Elijah repairs the altar of the God of Israel and then orders that it be drenched with water (twelve barrels of water). He asks God to accept the sacrifice. Fire falls from the sky, igniting the sacrifice. Elijah seizes the moment and orders the death of the prophets of Baal. Elijah prays earnestly for rain to fall again on the land. Then the rains begin, signaling the end of the famine.

Reflection

Not only did God ask Elijah to go into enemy territory where Baal is worshipped along with other gods and the ruling King wants him eliminated, but he takes on the idolatrous worship in a showdown of galactic proportions. He calls Israel to reunite under Jehovah as the nation Israel (12 stones). God answers Elijah's prayers with fire and torrential rain.

Making It Personal

Put yourself in Elijah's position.

- What would you have been feeling and fearing?
- How was God's preparation of him for this time essential (fed by a raven at Cherith, a place of cutting, and then by a destitute widow at Zarephath, the refinery)?
- How confident would you be, crouched down and in prayer, awaiting God's end to several years of drought?
- If you were in the audience, what did you observe and hear that moved you to belief?
- What do you think Ahab was thinking and feeling during the events of this day? What happened to his "voice?"

Application

Idolatry is not a historically isolated failing of Israel, but a contemporary illness as virulent as the H1N1 virus. Anything we do or seek (worship) that takes the place of the soul-satisfying, loving provision of God is idolatry. We worship that which we believe has the ability to meet our needs. When we define ourselves by our positions, our power, or our possessions, we are participating in idolatry. After Elijah's challenge to stop "hesitating between two opinions" and make a choice, the people were silent (1 Kings 18:21)—unable to repent (change their direction or re-turn, Isaiah 30:15) and follow the Lord.

- Understanding that re-turning is a gift of love given by the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 18:37b), can you see things in your life that you have trusted instead of the Lord through faith in His provision and unconditional love?
- This was Elijah's "ShowTime." What idol(s) do you need to turn from in your life?

Going Deeper

We humans have a survival instinct that leads us to rely on our strength. In the Kingdom of God, weakness *is* strength (2 Corinthians 12:10). We can figure out all of life's problems and solve them—can't we? A big, religious lie that we embrace is that we can save ourselves through knowing, performing, or serving.

- What evidence of that lie do you see in your approach to your spiritual life?

- What does it take to convince you of something?
 - Are facts and information adequate to effect life change?
 - How do relationships play a role in this?
- What does your answer to the previous question say about what (Whom) you should be pursuing?
- Is our salvation a single event or an event that begins a journey? What does this look like in your life? Draw a timeline of significant life changes and what was going on at the time. Selah (stop and listen).