

13. Among the gathered throng, the question to consider is how many of them still retained any recall of the Levitical offerings. The answer is, “not many,” but every person gathered was about to get a powerful reminder from on high of an overwhelming divine response to Elijah’s offering:

**1 Kings 18:38** Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

1. The divine fire is said to have “consumed” the burnt offering. The verb, אָכַל (*’achal*): “to devour; to consume.”
2. This is the key verse of the passage. The priests of Baal, using exactly the same items upon their altar, had solicited absolutely nothing after 9 fruitless hours of caterwauling, gyrating, and bloodletting on and around their altar.
3. Elijah’s efforts were first expended on preparing the kind of altar that the Mosaic Law prescribed and dousing it with three applications of water upon it just prior to the divine consummation of the entire display.
4. Here are some essential details regarding the development of the altar, the provision of the cited water, and the ultimate divine imputation of fire.
5. Verses 31–37 provide an inventory of the elements Elijah used to prepare and present his offering of an ox: (1) twelve stones according to the twelve tribes of Israel [v. 31], (2) digging a trench around the altar [v. 32], (3) the arrangement of the wood and the dismembered pieces of the ox upon it [v. 33] (4) the pouring of four pitchers of water done three times upon the ox and the wood [vv. 34–35], and (5) prayer to the Lord for His divine response to his efforts [vv. 36–37].
6. Several details regarding these verses need to be addressed and we do so from the following analysis by C. F. Keil:

Elijah took twelve stones, “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, Israel shall be thy name,” and built these stones into an altar. He then arranged the sacrifice upon the altar, and then had four (pails) of water poured three times in succession upon the burnt-offering which was laid upon the pieces of wood, so that water flowed round about the altar, and then had the trench filled with water.

7. As noted earlier, some have argued that the three-and one-half-year drought surely included Mount Cárnel and the Kīshōn River, but our research has resolved that argument.

Elijah adopted this course or the purpose of precluding all suspicion of even the possibility of fraud in connection with the miraculous burning of the sacrifice. For idolaters had carried their deceptions to such a length, that they would set fire to the wood of the sacrifices from hollow spaces concealed beneath the altars, in order to make the credulous people believe that the sacrifice had been miraculously set on fire by the deity.<sup>5</sup>

### Analysis of the details related to 1 Kings 18:38

1. The fire proceeding from Jehovah was not a natural flash of lightning, which could not produce any such effect, but miraculous fire directly from heaven.
2. In 1 Kings 18:38 we find the phrase, “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering.”
3. Elijah included this phrase in his challenge to the priests of Baal in:

**1 Kings 18:24** You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”

4. Fire from the Lord revealed divine acceptance of certain special and separate sacrifices. We also may cite similar descriptions of divine fire which Elijah obviously understood and applied on Mount C armel:

**Leviticus 9:24** Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

**1 Chronicles 21:26** Then David built an altar to the Lord there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And he called to the Lord and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.

**2 Chronicles 7:1** Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.

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<sup>5</sup> C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Books of the Kings*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 248–49.



5. This divine fire would never have fallen and consumed the altar of the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Elijah's appeal was to demonstrate that the fire he requested was "from heaven."
6. It is also true that in certain contexts fire from the Lord does fall in judgment on the apostate such as King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. However, in this context the divine fire was directed at the ox which was guiltless.
7. The ox, made of flesh and blood, was innocent of any sin and thus a perfect illustration of the prophesied Messiah:

**2 Corinthians 5:21**

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

8. Elijah's ox was innocent. The fire was sent from heaven. The ox and the altar plus the stones and the water were consumed in an instant thus demonstrating divine judgment on an innocent, substitutionary sacrifice.
9. Sometimes a person who is in the cosmic system suddenly realizes that his moment of truth has arrived. Some respond from fear due to the undeniable clarity of that moment, while others do so from humility.
10. Among the 1.5 million assembled on the slopes of Mount Carmel, both categories did in unison "fall on their faces":

**1 Kings 18:39**

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."

1. A question arises as to why God used fire to confirm his presence when what was so desperately needed was rain. The answer has to do with priorities. The reason the drought had been divinely imposed was because the people of the priest nation had abandoned the God of Israel and instead had redirected their faith to the worship of idols.
2. Order had to be restored. God and His power and presence was the prerequisite required before the drought could be lifted. Therefore, the challenge for mental attitude adjustment must precede the provision of water.

Before the blessings of the rain could come, a substitute had to intervene. The fire also symbolized the revelation of the divine name. God was there present on Mount Carmel with His servant Elijah. By these means the people of Israel would come to know that the Lord alone was God and that He it was who was at that moment turning their hearts back to Himself to serve Him.



When the fire of God fell, it was no natural flash of lightning; it was the supernatural intervention by the Lord Himself as could be seen in the fact that it consumed not only the pieces of the bull on the altar and the wood underneath it, but it also devoured the stones and the water in the trench surrounding it.<sup>6</sup>

3. These events included two miracles. First, the fire came from God. Second, it consumed what ordinary fire does not destroy—stone, dust, water. This was not lightning, but a supernatural fire that demonstrated the omnipotence of God and an answer to Elijah’s prayer.
4. However, verse 39 begins with this statement, “When all the people saw it (the miracle), they fell on their faces.”
5. The verb “saw” is the Qal, active, imperfect of רָאָה (*ra’ah*). The imperfect tense means that all 1.5 million people saw the same thing, but that each individual saw it in different ways.
6. Regardless of the fact they all witnessed the same event, there were enumerable ways that what they saw was interpreted. Some concluded that Baal had done the deed; some concluded God had done it, and even a few may have assumed the priests had solicited Baal to do it.
7. Illustration: This is why among the world’s religions, they all assert allegiance to a certain “god,” but their interpretation of what their “god” is able to do is quite different from all the others.
8. Thus, in the harmonious chant, “The Lord, He is God,” the noun “Lord,” is the Hebrew proper noun, יְהוָה (*Yehowah*), plus the verb “is,” has to have a working object which is “God.”
9. Seems simple enough, but when it is understood that Baal was also considered by an overwhelming majority of these Jews to be “god,” then the overall impact of Elijah’s sacrifice becomes complex.
10. Many may have bought into the idea that “the Lord is God,” but others may have interpreted the phrase as referring to Baal:

Baal (meaning *owner, master, lord*). The most important use of the title in the Old Testament is its reference to the great active god of the Canaanite pantheon, who controlled rain and fertility. In the process of time Baal became the region’s chief deity. (p. 432)

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<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Lives and Ministries of Elijah and Elisha* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2019), 19–20.



The northern kingdom was more susceptible to the inroads of the native Canaanite cults than was the more isolated and largely agricultural kingdom of Judah. Thus Israel sustained the deliberate attempt by the Phoenician princess Jezebel to obliterate Yahweh worship

The 8th century prophets recognized the dangers inherent in the situation and called the people back to a belief in Yahweh<sup>7</sup> alone and to a cult purified of its Canaanite accretions. Hosea proposed that the name of Baal be no longer employed of Yahweh [see Hosea 2:16, 17 below] and he and Jeremiah, of all the prophets, pointed out the dangers of a Canaanized Yahweh cultus to a people who were quite unaware of their apostasy. Once this was realized, the name of Baal was regarded with abhorrence. Only after two major reformations aimed at the elimination of Baal worship and the chastisement involved in the national disaster of 587 B.C., did a majority of the Jews finally forsake the last vestiges of Baal worship and turn in contrition to Yahweh, the covenant God.<sup>8</sup> (p. 433)

**Hosea 2:16** “It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord, “That you will call Me Ishi (שׁוֹשׁוּן [’iysh]: protective husband) and will no longer call me Baali (בַּעַלְיָ [ba’liy]: “my master”).<sup>9</sup>

**v. 17** “For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more.

11. The 1.5 million Jews gathered on Mount Cármel present a wide variety of heathenistic practices taught to them by the priests of Baal and Ashérah. The deity Elijah referred to in his prayer as “the Lord, He is God” could easily be interpreted by many as Baal.

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<sup>7</sup> Hosea 2:16

<sup>8</sup> A. E. Cundall, “Baal,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 1:432–33.

<sup>9</sup> “There are wordplays on the terms שׁוֹשׁוּן (’iysh) and בַּעַלְיָ (ba’liy) here. The term Ishi, “my husband” is a title of affection as the counterpart to אִשְׁשָׁחַ (ishshah), “wife”). The term בַּעַלְיָ (ba’li, “my lord”) emphasizes the husband’s legal position. The relationship will no longer be conditioned on the outward legal commitment but on a new inward bond of mutual affection and love” (*NET Bible* Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1996–2005), Hosea 2:16tn14.



12. Elijah decided to call out the priests who had for years concocted the lie that the people of the Northern Kingdom had chosen to follow. His decision is one that often occurs when a person wins a critical victory and celebrates it with arrogance:

**1 Kings 18:40** Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kíshōn and slew them there.

1. The events that transpired over the course of 1 Kings 18:37–39 may have been less than a couple of minutes. Elijah’s prayer has petitioned the Father in verse 36, “Today let it be known that You are the God of Israel.” Then he places himself in the appeal, “Answer me, O Lord ... that this people may know that You ... have turned their heart back again.”
2. Immediately, “the fire of the Lord fell and consumed” all the elements of the altar and its surroundings to which the people responded by falling on their faces and said, “The Lord He is God.”
3. What was required here but did not, was a Bible class. God got the whole crowd’s attention and they were at least for that moment in time ready to hear what Elijah had to say about what just happened.
4. Instead of delivering a dynamic sermon to the riveted congregation, he decided not to seize the advantage and teach the Word but to erroneously assume the office of law enforcement and round up Ahab’s clergy.
5. The priests of Baal have used violence to enforce their heathen religion. Now Elijah does the very same thing. Did any one of these priests respond positively to the divine display at the altar? Would he have been able to give a clear testimony about the power of Elijah’s God? How many among the mass there gathered would have been willing to do so?
6. Had James been on the scene, he would have recommended the Royal Law. Since his appearance on the scene was about a millennium away, Elijah could have cited Moses one more time from:

**Leviticus 19:18** ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.’

7. Instead, the first thing Elijah said was:

**1 Kings 18:40a** “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.”

(End RECK-20.11. See RECK-20.12 for continuation of study at p. 111.)

