

Mount Carmel

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[0:00] Good morning. It's fantastic to see you all. It's also nice that it's not quite so hot as it has been, and I'm sure you agree. As has been mentioned, my name is Sean.

I'm part of the leadership team here at Harvest Church, and I'm basically going to be continuing the story of Elijah the prophet.

So over the last few weeks, we've been looking at various things that happened in his life and how he served God in Israel. As we head into this morning, just to say that the country of Israel and the land around have been suffering with a drought for three and a half years.

Elijah has been off, out. God has been looking after him, and he now returns, and he's about to confront the king Ahab.

And then there's going to be a showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, but also between God, the creator God, and this false god, Baal.

[1:14] And it's going to happen at a place called Mount Carmel, which is a, I suppose you consider it a hill or a low mountain, but at the end of a range which juts out into the Mediterranean Sea.

And it's important that we grasp where this showdown takes place. Normally, Mount Carmel was a place which would experience heavy rain, rather like this country normally experiences heavy rain, but it hadn't, not just for a summer, but for three and a half years.

It was normally fertile, but it would have been brown. I'm sure you can get the gist of what brown grass looks like. It was also a natural amphitheatre, so it was a great place for lots of people to gather and to hear one or two folk speaking out.

But also, it was the supposed dwelling place of this false god, Baal. It was where a lot of worship went on towards him.

And this Baal, which the people of Israel had started to, had been worshipping and were including into their religion, he was a god supposedly of storms, so of rain.

[2:32] Well, he hadn't done very well on that in the last three years, three and a half years, but also of lightning as well. So hence, we'll see later on the whole thing about fire. And God's people had kind of been blending their religion, if you like, their belief, their worship.

So yes, they were still worshipping the God of Israel, the creator God, but they had been bringing in this worship of Baal and other gods. So they had feet in both camps.

And this was part of the cause of the drought, that God had said, right, no more rain. And this had come through the prophet Elijah.

And so after three and a half years of drought and many streams and rivers had dried up, the crops had failed, Elijah finally comes back to confront King Ahab, who is the king of Israel.

And just as we head into our passage in a moment in 1 Kings 18, the verse before Ahab has met with Elijah, and he accuses Elijah for the drought, for the trouble.

[3:44] So let's get into it then. So it will come up on the screen, but if you want to look in your own Bibles, 1 Kings 18, we're going to be reading verses 18 to 14.

Okay, so this is Elijah's response to Ahab's accusation of him causing trouble.

Verse 18. I have not made trouble for Israel, Elijah replied, but you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's command and followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

So just to say, Jezebel was married to King Ahab. She was a Phoenician princess, which was actually just over the border, as it were, from Mount Carmel.

[4:52] And she had, once married to Ahab, had started to systematically kill off the prophets of the Lord. So Elijah's contemporaries. So she had been bringing in the religion of worshipping Baal and Asherah.

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, How long will you waver between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. So going back to Egypt, God had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt through Moses.

Many of you remember the story that how he had sustained them in the wilderness and then he brought them into the promised land where they had had many victories. And then he said, Right, continue to worship me.

Do not worship the gods of the people that you have ousted and are around you. But the people didn't think God was enough.

[6:07] That they actually thought, Well, we need this God of rain and fertility and storms and all these things. So they were including in all these different gods to worship.

But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left. So Elijah is standing alone.

There are these 450 prophets of Baal and just Elijah, the prophet of God. But he has God with him. I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left.

But Baal has 450 prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it.

I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your God and I will call on the name of the Lord.

[7:14] The God who answers by fire, he is God. As I mentioned earlier, Baal is believed to be this God of lightning, of fire.

So obviously this should be an easy test for him, you know, to be able to produce fire when called upon. Then all the people said, what you say is good.

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your God, but do not light the fire.

So they took the bull given them and prepared it. So just a quick thing here regarding the bull. A bull was a primary emblem of Baal.

In fact, Baal was often depicted as standing on a bull with a thunderbolt in his hand. So the sacrifice of a bull to Baal would have been very normal.

[8:21] Hence why they would have readily agreed to this kind of sacrifice. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. Baal, answer us, they shouted.

But there was no response. No one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon, Elijah began to taunt them.

Shout louder, he said. Surely he is a God. Perhaps he is deep in thought or busy or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.

So Elijah has been watching all of this dancing and prancing and shouting and screaming and now he starts to mock them. He accuses their God of being so weak that he's got to have a nap.

Or that he goes on holiday. He even goes on to suggest that maybe he's sitting on the toilet relieving himself.

[9:26] Now I don't know whether the rest of Israel were laughing at this but Elijah is mocking them because their God is impotent, is unable to do anything.

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears as was their custom until their blood flowed. Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice.

But there was no response. No one answered and no one paid attention. We move on to Then Elijah said to all the people Come here to me.

They came to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob to whom the word of the Lord had come saying Your name shall be Israel.

With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two sears of seed. Two sears of seed.

[10:42] Well there's two opinions on what this that meant for this trench. Some would suggest that it was just a trench big enough to hold two sears of seed which would have been about fifteen litres which doesn't sound very much but that could be that's one interpretation.

The other interpretation is that it was a trench large enough to enclose an area that two sears of seed could be sown into and this actually equates to about forty-five metres by twenty-three metres which is slightly smaller than the size of this building but is also maybe not coincidentally the size of the tabernacle court.

As well so maybe a small trench maybe a huge trench you decide okay so moving on verse 33 he arranged the wood cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood then he said to them fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood do it again he said and they did it again do it a third time he ordered and they did it the third time the water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench at that time of sacrifice which would have been 3pm so 3 in the afternoon the prophet prophet prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed none of this dancing and slashing with spears and knives just a simple prayer Lord the God of Abraham Isaac and Israel let it be known today that you are God in Israel that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command answer me

Lord answer me so these people will know that you Lord are God and you are turning their hearts back again then the fire of the Lord fell not a spark not even just some lightning but a consuming fire fell and burned up the sacrifice the wood the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench now imagine if this trench was nearly the size of this building this is a lot of fire coming down and all the people saw this they fell prostrate and cried the Lord he is God the Lord he is God then Elijah commanded them seize the prophets of Baal don't let anyone get away they seized them and Elijah had them brought down to the

Kishon valley which ran below Mount Carmel and slaughtered them there so they were put to death below Mount Carmel quite an impressive showdown and I so enjoy reading this and looking into this it's such a great passage but I wanted to pick up on five very quick points this morning from this first one is this this wasn't just Elijah's idea this was God's plan God saw the people sin he saw the relationship that was broken and he aims to restore it in verse 37 that we read Elijah says to God you are turning their hearts back again this was God's plan not Elijah's sacrifice so this sacrifice the people sin so they have been sinning they've turned their backs on

[14:41] God the people's sin needs to be dealt with so hence a sacrifice of a bull so our second point is a sacrifice now they're not at the tabernacle but Elijah uses what he's got he rebuilds an altar he uses 12 stones to symbolise the 12 tribes of Israel at this point they'd been split and this was 10 tribes a potentially this courtyard area and he takes a bull which in the book of Leviticus is said to you should use a bull if the people have sinned and then this the blood of the bull is poured out for the people's sin so they can be forgiven and then the people can and then it's all soaked water poured everywhere just to prove God's power and that there's no cheating so fire falls

Baal had failed he was supposed to be this god of lightning but he had done nothing but God shows up everything is consumed the sacrifice the wood the stones the soil even the water everything is consumed and the fire serves as the ultimate visual validation of God's authentic presence and approval the sacrifice was accepted so that people could be forgiven and return in relationship to him our fourth point enemy defeated Baal has clearly been defeated he has failed completely God is triumphant and the end of that is that these false prophets of Baal are slaughtered they are killed so they cannot continue to lead the people astray so our final point here is that there is a choice for for the people to make

God or continue with this false God Baal the people have already declared in verse 39 the Lord he is God the Lord he is God but the people still need to choose they need to choose to turn away from this mixed religion this acceptance of God but including other gods into what they do the relationship with God was to be a monotheistic what does that mean one God only no other gods they had a choice to make God was saying it's all just me or none of me all or nothing so this is a very dramatic hilltop encounter you would agree but let's look at the greatest hilltop hilltop encounter and use those five points what I mean is Calvary where Jesus died I'm going to rearrange the order very slightly of our five points but we're going to work through the same five points so

God's plan we mankind were created to be in relationship with God but sin caused us to stray to go from his presence for that relationship to be broken but God had a plan to restore that relationship

because that's what he wanted us to be in relationship with him that's what we were created for so God had a plan now our sin requires punishment before a holy God he can't just let it slide death had power over us and so a sacrifice was required for the sins of all mankind a perfect sinless sacrifice because the blood of bulls would not be good enough but

Jesus went to the cross he allowed his blood to be poured out his body to be broken on that cross and we will remember that in a few minutes time as we take communion and that perfect sacrifice not of a bull but of the son of God was enough for all sin and at that cross the enemy was defeated he rose from death on the third day sin and death and the devil were all defeated at the cross a way to return to God relationship restored not through our own goodness or through our own deeds but through Jesus the acceptance of

[20:20] Jesus as our Lord and Saviour adopted into his family so you might say well I've missed one or not done the fire yet where is the fire 50 days later at Pentecost the disciples are meeting in the upper room praying and seeking God and tongues of fire fall upon them not just not fire to consume a sacrifice anymore but the Holy Spirit fire falling upon the disciples and again the fire serves as the ultimate visual validation of God's authentic presence and approval not a momentary fire but his power upon and within us available to all who receive Jesus as I said earlier and this is for the kids on your note the

God who answers by fire he is God and so it brings us to our final point a choice God or the world the Israelites had a choice but their choice wasn't that they were serving God or Baal they were serving both and so the question is I guess for us who are Christians do we have a mixed religion are we serving God but also serving the world is it only Jesus Lord and Saviour that's what he's calling us to no mixed religion so let's wrap up maybe you're at a place where this is news that you've not heard before or you've not really received before that you've maybe never accepted Jesus for the first time that you're not a Christian that he isn't Lord and Saviour of your life I think in a moment I'm just going to give an opportunity if you're in that place you think yes I want this Jesus I'm just going to say a simple prayer and if that's for you you can either say it after me or say amen at the end but there's also this challenge for each one of us that God wants us to be 100% for him no other religion no other gods in our lives or maybe you're thinking about that fire that fell and Pentecost and thinking I could do with the power of the Holy Spirit maybe it's for the first time or maybe it's just a refreshing and a filling of the Holy Spirit I think as the a little while we're going to have communion and maybe we will pray into those a little bit more but I just wanted to give that opportunity for anyone that's not received

Jesus yet as their Lord and Saviour he wants to restore that relationship with you and it's through Jesus who died on a cross paid the penalty for your sins it's not through anything that you have done it's not that you're too even that you're too bad because his death paid for all sin I'm just going to invite us to stand I think let's have the band up as well please I'm just going to say a very simple prayer and if this is for you please do you can repeat after me or you can just say amen at the end I just want to acknowledge that I have sinned that the relationship with you is broken that I am a sinner but I acknowledge that your sacrifice on the cross pays the penalty for my sin that I can know restored relationship with you please forgive me and accept me into your family amen