

“THE GOD WHO ANSWERS BY FIRE”

Revival Fires Series #2

I Kings 18:16-40

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Charles Swindoll gives us a good example of the absolute necessity for obedience to the Lord our God. He says, “My wife, Cynthia, and I had the pleasure of spending an evening with former astronaut, General Charles M. Duke. All of us in the room sat in rapt fascination as the man told of the *Apollo 16* mission to the moon, including some interesting tidbits related to driving “Rover,” the lunar vehicle, and his actually walking on the surface. We were full of questions which General Duke patiently and carefully answered one after another.

“I asked, ‘Once you were there, weren’t you free to make your own decisions and carry out some of your own experiments ... you know, sort of do as you pleased - maybe stay a little longer if you liked?’ He smiled back, ‘Sure, Chuck, if we didn’t want to return to earth!’

“He then described the intricate plan, the exact and precise instructions, the essential discipline, the instant obedience that was needed right down to the split second. By the way, he said they had landed somewhat ‘heavy’ when they touched down on the moon. He was referring to their fuel supply. They had plenty left. Guess how much. *One minute*. They landed with sixty seconds of fuel remaining. Talk about being exact! I got the distinct impression that a rebel doesn’t fit inside a spacesuit. Whoever represents the United States in the space program must have an unconditional respect for authority.”<sup>1</sup>

Christian friends, we need that same kind of absolute obedience in this world when it comes to God’s Word and Commands. **While many in our world think that they are free to do whatever they want while they are here, they fail to understand that obedience is absolutely necessary if we are to planning to get “Home” when this mission in life is finished.**

You see, God has set up His standards, His exact specifications for us, and He expects us not only to abide by them, but to teach them to one another so that all of us can find His blessings and abundance in our lives. **God has called all of us to follow Him in all our ways.** Yet many of us are

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<sup>1</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 414)

like rebels in spacesuits freewheeling our life any ole way that we determine. And sadly, the end result will be exposed in due time when we try to make it home by trusting in our own will and our own way.

The Bible has many examples of those who have tried to follow their own ways in life, only to find out that their way brought only destruction and death. Today's account of Elijah on Mount Carmel, found in I Kings 18, demonstrates who is really in control, and what the consequences of our disobedience are. Let me give you the background of today's reading.

*“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa King of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. **Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.** He...began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him”* (I Kings 17:29-33). (Doesn't that sound familiar to what we have today?)

Now, Baal was the Amorite pagan god of winter-rain and storm, supposedly the one providing the abundance of fertile lands on which the people of Israel had acquired upon their exodus from Egypt. Baal was worshipped by the Amorites and Canaanites as the one who provided yearly rains to bring about the growth of the crops. Baal's worshipers appeased him by offering sacrifices, usually animals such as sheep or bulls. At times of crisis, however, Baal's followers sacrificed their children, apparently the firstborn of the community, to gain personal prosperity. The Lord called this practice “detestable,” and forbade the people to worship anyone but Him. It is the first of the 10 Commandments given to the people at Mt. Sinai. *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me”* (Exodus 20:2-3). The Bible's repeated condemnation of child sacrifice shows God's hatred of it, especially among his people.

Then, Asherah was the Amorite mother goddess of fertility. Asherah was worshiped in various ways, including through ritual sex. Although she was believed to be Baal's mother, she was also his mistress. Believing the sexual union of Baal and Asherah produced fertility, their worshipers engaged

in immoral sex to cause the gods to join together, ensuring good harvests. This practice became the basis for religious prostitution (1 Kings 14:23-24). The priest or a male member of the community represented Baal. The priestess or a female member of the community represented Asherah. In this way, God's incredible gift of sexuality was perverted to the most obscene public prostitution. **No wonder God's anger burned against his people and their leaders when they worshipped Baal and Asherah.**<sup>2</sup>

The worship of these two deities together was to help the followers rely upon them to give them ample rain in the winter and multiplication of the flocks and crops to grow and feed the peoples. They were also the ones who were relied upon to grant large families and large flocks. The people of Israel were led over and over again by their leaders to worship this pagan god and goddess, much to the Lord God Almighty's great anger.

So when Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, sought to eliminate all of God's prophets and spiritual leaders in order to promote the worship of Baal and Asherah, God called Elijah to inform the people of the land, "*As **the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word***" (I Kings 17:1). After giving this statement, God instructed Elijah to leave and go into hiding until this decree would be felt in the land. But God provided food and water for him, both at the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan River, and in Zarephath with a widow and her son.

As Jezebel sought to kill all of the prophets of the Lord God, Obadiah was protecting 100 of them in two different caves near the city, supplying them with food and water (I Kings 18:3-4). Obadiah was the overseer of the whole palace, so he had ample supplies to take care of the prophets of God during that time. He faithfully protected them from the murderous hand of Queen Jezebel all during the drought. She had commanded the execution of every prophet of the Lord, but Obadiah protected 100.

So the drought gets worse and worse. Imagine no rain for years at a time! We're not told how many children were sacrificed to Baal during that time, pleading for him to bring rain, but one could

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<sup>2</sup> (Focus on the Family, *That the Whole World Might Know*, web page on *Baal*.)

only imagine that no community in Israel, beginning in Samaria, was unscathed by the death toll of the sacrifice of children during those years. Makes me wonder if we aren't in a similar situation today.

With all of the sexual deviancy being lifted up as normal, the exploitation of women and children for the sake of appeasing the "gods" of pleasure and prosperity, and the demand for the support of the abortion industry from our leaders around the world, are we not right where the people of Israel were? Are we not worshipping Baal and Asherah in our society today? Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

**Well, after three years of drought, God called Elijah to go find Ahab and challenge him to a contest of who was God.** Was it Baal, the god of the Amorites and Canaanites, or was it Yahweh, the God of Israel? Were King Ahab and Queen Jezebel rightly leading the people of Israel into prosperity and security under Baal's blessings? Or were they seeking to destroy any vestige of the Jewish religion and with it bring the nation into destruction all for the sake of pleasure and power?

While Ahab claimed that the drought was all Elijah's fault (as it certainly happened as he prophesied the drought according to Yahweh's command), Elijah explains that it was not because of him that the drought came onto Israel, but rather because of Ahab's abandoning the ways of the Lord's commands (I Kings 18:18). **When the leaders of the nations turn away from the commands of the Lord God Almighty, consequences always happen, and the people are always the ones who bear the brunt of God's wrath.**

So Ahab complied with Elijah's challenge and brought together all of the prophets of Baal, all 450 of them, and all of the prophets of Asherah, all 400 of them, all who ate at Jezebel's table, and Elijah went by himself as God's prophet, and they went up onto Mount Carmel, where they would settle it for good which one could bring about the end of the drought. And Elijah went among all the people of the area calling them to make the choice between Baal and Yahweh. Though they would not commit at that point whom they would follow, they went along to witness the contest. **Elijah challenged the people, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal**

*is God, follow him (I Kings 18:21)*. He wanted each person to make their choice as to whom they would serve, just as Joshua had challenged the people before they went into the Promised Land.

So Elijah set the contest rules. The prophets of Baal would prepare a sacrifice of a bull to the one they believed was god, but put no fire to it. Then they were to call upon Baal and invite him to come and burn up the sacrifice as a sign of his authority and power. Whatever they needed to do to arouse Baal's presence and response, they were to do it. And Elijah would set up an altar and prepare a sacrifice to the God of Israel, but put no fire into it, and call upon Him to start the fire. It was to be that "*the god who answers by fire - he is God*" (I Kings 18:24). Everyone agreed to the test. And then it began.

The prophets of Baal and Asherah went about preparing their sacrifice and prayed to Baal, and called for him to answer them (18:26). They believed that Baal was the god of rain, so certainly he could send lightning down to start the fire on the altar. So all morning they danced around trying to get Baal's attention, yet nothing happened. These people were so desperate for water for the land of Israel. So there were probably some other indecent acts that they performed before the people around the altar to Baal, all to please their god and get him to send fire for the sacrifice. But it was all for naught!

Listen to the rest of the account in I Kings 18:27-40. (READ I Kings 18:27-40)

**The worship of any other god or goddess other than Yahweh is an act of utter foolishness and wasted energy.** When we seek after personal pleasure, when we demand power, when we mandate the compliance and worship of any other God outside of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be no response, no positive result and no eternal security. There is no other God who brings life to us as humans than the God of Israel, through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. There is no benefit to worshipping any other god, because then we will have the Lord God Almighty as our enemy.

These men and women seeking to bring fire to their sacrifice to Baal and Asherah were left standing there, bloody and exhausted, with nothing resulting from their efforts. It was not only a waste of their time but complete nonsense. And Elijah made that very clear as he called out to them, "*shout*

*louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened” (18:27). But nothing happened and “no one paid attention” (18:29). **All their efforts to get Baal’s attention went unanswered Because He Is Not A God!** Both Baal and Asherah are figments of our great imagination, and when we begin to worship that imagination as something real, we as a people deceive ourselves and find God’s wrath rather than His blessing. No nation on the earth can ever hope to be blessed by God unless they follow the Lord God Almighty through Jesus Christ our Savior! Everything else is purely foolishness.*

**So we have to make a choice to make as to whom we will serve - the imaginary gods of this world, or the One and Only True God of the Universe.** There was only one response by fire that day, and it was not from Baal or Asherah.

Elijah demonstrated who IS GOD for us. When he gathered the people around him, he rebuilt the altar of the Lord using twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. This altar had been destroyed by Jezebel and Ahab in their pursuit of making Baal the god of Israel. Once he had rebuilt the altar, he dug a large trench around the altar. Then he arranged the wood and the sacrifice on the altar. Lastly, he ordered that four large jars of water be poured upon the whole thing, wetting everything down. Not just once, but three times Elijah told them to pour the four large jars of water onto the body of the bull, the wood on the altar and the altar itself, until it filled and overflowed the trench around the altar. Everything was absolutely soaked with water.

Now how many of you are able to start a fire with wet wood? Sure you could add gasoline or kerosene to it, or put a starter log of some kind under the wood to get it going, but all by itself, wet wood just doesn’t burn. **Elijah was making it exponentially harder to get the fire going on the altar to the Lord God Almighty.** He went to great extreme to demonstrate the awesome power of the Lord God.

But at just the point where there seemed to be no way that any fire could be used to burn the sacrifice to the Lord, *“Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and have done all these*

*things at Your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You are turning their hearts back again” (18:36-37). A very brave prayer to make with a drenched sacrifice sitting there before him. When there seemed to be no way for any fire to be set upon the altar, Elijah prays boldly for the Lord God to act as a sign to the people that HE IS GOD.*

The words have barely left his mouth, not even time to say AMEN, and the Lord God Almighty answers him in an astounding way. God was not on vacation; He wasn't busy; He wasn't sleeping; He wasn't in the bathroom relieving Himself. God was attentive to hear the prayers of Elijah, and was delighted to answer in such a way as to show that He is God. *“Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench” (I Kings 18:38).* There was nothing left there but a hole in the ground. **God's all-consuming fire burned up everything, leaving no doubt that He was, AND IS, the Only True God!**

You see, “It is never too late for God to work. No situation is ever so hopeless that it is useless to pray. No church can become so compromised or backslidden that God cannot send fresh, new blessing. No people has ever become so sinful that God gave them up and no longer yearned to save them. It was not too late for God, and it was not too late for Elijah...

“Instantly the thousands watching fell on their faces in humble acknowledgement and worship of [the Lord God Almighty]. Over and over they shouted, “Jehovah - He is God! Jehovah - He is God!” **Never in history was there so instant a revival.** The people seized the false prophets who had been deceiving them and in accordance with God's command in Exodus 22:20, Deuteronomy 13:5, and 18:20, put them to death. God had dealt Baal worship a tremendous blow.”<sup>3</sup>

God desires that the leaders of His people be faithful to Him and keep true their worship of Him among the nations where His people reside. Unfortunately, as we see in the Old Testament accounts in the Bible, and even to today, many desire to deceive and mislead the people into believing and even worshipping Satan's lies. We see the attempted extermination of the faithful followers who are desiring

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<sup>3</sup> (Wesley Duewel, *Revival Fires*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zonvervan, 1995] pg. 19-21)

to live according to God's ways. We are witnessing the great dismantling of the Christian church where leaders are incorporating demonic beliefs and practices into the life of the local churches, leading the people of faith to believe lies, and even worship the Baals and Asherahs of our world's evil mindset.

**Oh that the God who answers by fire would discipline and destroy the leaders of the church who are adamantly misleading the people of God away from Him.** Oh that the fire of God would descend upon each one of our hearts to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and purify us once more to be His holy people! Oh that God might start a revival right here in this place, demonstrating to each one of us that He Is God, and He alone! Oh, that this church might become a beacon of light into the darkness of this world so that all those around us might see the Truth of the Lord and come to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord! Come, Holy Spirit, Come upon each of us today and do Your work in us so that we might see God with us.

It all starts with prayer. The Lord has promised us, ***"if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).***

People, turn to the God who answers by fire, trust in Him, follow Him and obey His commands, and you will not be disappointed. Let's pray.

Father, there is so much in this world that seeks to entice us and distract us from worshipping You. Forgive us today, O Lord for our foolishness in chasing other gods and goddesses. You don't want lip service from those who call You Lord and Savior, but rather people of faith. Draw us back to You once more as You did the people of Israel on Mount Carmel in the days of Elijah. Turn our hearts to recognize Jesus as Our promised Messiah, who has come to set all people free from sin and death, to bring them into Your everlasting arms. Draw us near to You, O Lord God Almighty, so that You are the only one that we serve. And give us to be such witnesses of Your glory that all will see it and come to You, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.