

The Sacrifice on Mount Carmel

Elijah demands a convocation at Carmel of all Israel and also of all the prophets of Baal. The awful solemnity in the looks of the prophet gives him the appearance of one standing in the presence of the Lord God of Israel. The condition of Israel in their apostasy demands a firm demeanor, stern speech, and commanding authority. God prepares the message to fit the time and occasion. Sometimes He puts His Spirit upon His messengers to sound an alarm day and night, as did His messenger John: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Then, again, men of action are needed who will not be swerved from duty, but whose energy will arouse and demand, "Who is on the Lord's side?" let him come over with us. God will have a fitting message to meet His people in their varied conditions. [3T 279.1](#)

Swift messengers are sent throughout the kingdom with the message from Elijah. Representatives are sent from cities, towns, villages, and families. All seem in haste to answer the call, as though some wonderful miracle is to be performed. According to Elijah's command, Ahab gathers the prophets of Baal at Carmel. The heart of Israel's apostate leader is overawed, and he tremblingly follows the direction of the stern prophet of God. [3T 279.2](#)

The people assemble upon Mount Carmel, a place of beauty when the dew and rain fall upon it causing it to flourish; but now its beauty is languishing under the curse of God. Upon this mount, which was the excellency of groves and flowers, Baal's prophets had erected altars for their pagan worship. This mountain was conspicuous; it overlooked the surrounding countries and was in sight of a large portion of the kingdom. As God had been signally dishonored by the idolatrous worship carried on here, Elijah chose this as the most conspicuous place for the display of God's power and to vindicate His honor. [3T 279.3](#)

Jezebel's prophets, eight hundred and fifty in number, like a regiment of soldiers prepared for battle, march out in a body with instrumental music and imposing display. But there is trembling in their hearts as they consider that at the word of this prophet of Jehovah the land of Israel has been destitute of dew and rain three years. They feel that some fearful crisis is at hand. They had trusted in their gods, but could not unsay the words of Elijah and prove him false. Their gods were indifferent to their frantic cries, prayers, and sacrifices. [3T 279.4](#)

Elijah, early in the morning, stands upon Mount Carmel, surrounded by apostate Israel and the prophets of Baal. A lone man in that vast multitude, he stands undaunted. He whom the whole kingdom has charged with its weight of woe is before them, unterrified and unattended by visible armies and imposing display. He stands, clad in his coarse garment, with awful solemnity in his countenance, as though fully aware of his sacred commission as the servant of God to execute His commands. Elijah fastens his eyes upon the highest ridge of mountains where had stood the altar of Jehovah when the mountain was covered with flourishing trees and flowers. The blight of God is now upon it; all the desolation of Israel is in full view of the neglected, torn-down altar of Jehovah, and in sight are the altars of Baal. Ahab stands at the head of the priests of Baal, and all wait in anxious, fearful expectation for the words of Elijah. [3T 280.1](#)

In the full light of the sun, surrounded by thousands,—men of war, prophets of Baal, and the monarch of Israel,—stands the defenseless man, Elijah, apparently alone, yet not alone. The most powerful host of heaven surrounds him. Angels who excel in strength have come from heaven to shield the faithful and righteous prophet. With stern and commanding voice Elijah cries: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if

Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.” Not one in that vast assembly dared utter one word for God and show his loyalty to Jehovah. [3T 280.2](#)

What astonishing deception and fearful blindness had, like a dark cloud, covered Israel! This blindness and apostasy had not closed about them suddenly; it had come upon them gradually as they had not heeded the word of reproof and warning which the Lord had sent to them because of their pride and their sins. And now, in this fearful crisis, in the presence of the idolatrous priests and the apostate king, they remained neutral. If God abhors one sin above another, of which His people are guilty, it is doing nothing in case of an emergency. Indifference and neutrality in a religious crisis is regarded of God as a grievous crime and equal to the very worst type of hostility against God. [3T 280.3](#)

All Israel is silent. Again the voice of Elijah is heard addressing them: “I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.” [3T 281.1](#)

The proposition of Elijah is reasonable. The people dare not evade it, and they find courage to answer: The word is good. The prophets of Baal dare not dissent or evade the matter. God has directed this trial and has prepared confusion for the authors of idolatry and a signal triumph for His name. The priests of Baal dare not do otherwise than accept the conditions. With terror and guiltiness in their hearts, while outwardly bold and defiant, they rear their altar, lay on the wood and the victim, and then begin their incantations, their chanting and bawling, characteristics of pagan worship. Their shrill cries re-echo through forests and mountains: “O Baal, hear us.” The priests gather in an army about their altars, and with leaping, and writhing, and screaming, and stamping, and with unnatural gestures, and tearing their hair, and cutting their flesh, they manifest apparent sincerity. [3T 281.2](#)

The morning passes and noon comes, and yet there is no move of their gods in pity to Baal's priests, the deluded worshipers of idols. No voice answers their frantic cries. The priests are continually devising how, by deception, they can kindle a fire upon the altars and give the glory to Baal. But the firm eye of Elijah watches every motion. Eight hundred voices become hoarse. Their garments are covered with blood, and yet their frantic excitement does not abate. Their pleadings are mingled with cursings to their sun-god that he does not send fire for their altars. Elijah stands by, watching with eagle eye lest any deception should be practiced; for he knows that if, by any device, they could kindle their altar fire, he would be torn in pieces upon the spot. He wishes to show the people the folly of their doubting and halting between two opinions when they have the wonderful works of God's majestic power in their behalf and innumerable evidences of His infinite mercies and loving-kindness toward them. [3T 282.1](#)

“And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.” [3T 282.2](#)

How gladly would Satan, who fell like lightning from heaven, come to the help of those whom he has deceived, whose minds he has controlled, and who are fully devoted to his service. Gladly would he send the lightning and kindle their sacrifices; but Jehovah has set Satan's bounds. He has restrained his power, and all his devices cannot convey one spark to Baal's altars. Evening draws on. The prophets of Baal are weary, faint, and confused. One suggests one thing, and one another, until they cease their efforts. Their shrieks and curses no longer resound over Mount Carmel. With weakness and despair they retire from the contest. [3T 282.3](#)

The people have witnessed the terrible demonstrations of the unreasonable, frantic priests. They have beheld their leaping upon the altar as though they would grasp the burning rays from the sun to serve their altars. They have become tired of the exhibitions of demonism, of pagan idolatry; and they feel earnest and anxious to hear what Elijah will speak. [3T 283.1](#)

Elijah's turn has now come. “And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.” [3T 283.2](#)

Elijah at the hour of evening sacrifice repairs the altar of God which the apostasy of Israel has allowed the priests of Baal to tear down. He does not call upon one of the people to aid him in his laborious work. The altars of Baal are all prepared; but he turns to the broken-down altar of God, which is more sacred and precious to him in its unsightly ruins than all the magnificent altars of Baal. [3T 284.1](#)

Elijah respects the Lord's covenant with His people, although they have apostatized. With calmness and solemnity he repairs the broken-down altar with twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. The disappointed priests of Baal, wearied with their vain, frenzied efforts, are sitting or lying prostrate on the ground, waiting to see what Elijah

will do. They are filled with fear and hatred toward the prophet for proposing a test which has exposed their weakness and the inefficiency of their gods. [3T 284.2](#)

The people of Israel stand spellbound, pale, anxious, and almost breathless with awe, while Elijah calls upon Jehovah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The people have witnessed the fanatical, unreasonable frenzy of the prophets of Baal. In contrast they are now privileged to witness the calm, awe-inspiring deportment of Elijah. He reminds the people of their degeneracy, which has awakened the wrath of God against them, and then calls upon them to humble their hearts and turn to the God of their fathers, that His curse may be removed from them. Ahab and his idolatrous priests are looking on with amazement mingled with terror. They await the result with anxious, solemn silence. [3T 284.3](#)

After the victim is laid upon the altar, he commands the people to flood the sacrifice and the altar with water, and to fill the trench round about the altar. He then reverentially bows before the unseen God, raises his hands toward heaven, and offers a calm and simple prayer, unattended with violent gestures or contortions of the body. No shrieks resound over Carmel's height. A solemn silence, which is oppressive to the priests of Baal, rests upon all. In his prayer, Elijah makes use of no extravagant expressions. He prays to Jehovah as though He were nigh, witnessing the whole scene, and hearing his sincere, fervent, yet simple prayer. Baal's priests have screamed, and foamed, and leaped, and prayed, very long—from morning until near evening. Elijah's prayer is very short, earnest, reverential, and sincere. No sooner is that prayer uttered than flames of fire descend from heaven in a distinct manner, like a brilliant flash of lightning, kindling the wood for sacrifice and consuming the victim, licking up the water in the trench and consuming even the stones of the altar. The brilliancy of the blaze illumines the mountain and is painful to the eyes of the multitude. The people of the kingdom of Israel not gathered upon the mount are watching with interest those there assembled. As the fire descends, they witness it and are amazed at the sight. It resembles the pillar of fire at the Red Sea, which by night separated the children of Israel from the Egyptian host. [3T 284.4](#)

The people upon the mountain prostrate themselves in terror and awe before the unseen God. They cannot look upon the bright consuming fire sent from heaven. They fear that they will be consumed in their apostasy and sins, and cry out with one voice, which resounds over the mountain and echoes to the plains below with terrible distinctness: "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God." Israel is at last aroused and undeceived. They see their sin and how greatly they have dishonored God. Their anger is aroused against the prophets of Baal. With terror, Ahab and Baal's priests witness the wonderful exhibition of Jehovah's power. Again the voice of Elijah is heard in startling words of command to the people: "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." The people are ready to obey his word. They seize the false prophets who have deluded them, and bring them to the brook Kishon, and there, with his own hand, Elijah slays these idolatrous priests. [3T 285.1](#)

The judgments of God having been executed upon the false priests, the people having confessed their sins and acknowledged their fathers' God, the withering curse of God is now to be withdrawn, and He is to renew His blessings unto His people and again refresh the earth with dew and rain. [3T 286.1](#)

Elijah addresses Ahab: "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." While Ahab went up to feast, Elijah went up from the fearful sacrifice to the top of Mount Carmel to pray. His work of slaying the pagan priests had not unfitted him for the

solemn exercise of prayer. He had performed the will of God. After he had, as God's instrument, done what he could to remove the cause of Israel's apostasy by slaying the idolatrous priests, he could do no more. He then intercedes in behalf of sinning, apostate Israel. In the most painful position, his face bowed between his knees, he most earnestly supplicates God to send rain. Six times in succession he sends his servant to see if there is any visible token that God has heard his prayer. He does not become impatient and faithless because the Lord does not immediately give the token that his prayer is heard. He continues in earnest prayer, sending his servant seven times to see if God has granted any signal. His servant returns the sixth time from his outlook toward the sea with the discouraging report that there is no sign of clouds forming in the brassy heavens. The seventh time he informs Elijah that there is a small cloud to be seen, about the size of a man's hand. This is enough to satisfy the faith of Elijah. He does not wait for the heavens to gather blackness, to make the matter sure. In that small, rising cloud his faith hears the sound of abundance of rain. His works are in accordance with his faith. He sends a message to Ahab by his servant: "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." [3T 286.2](#)