

Explore the Bible: July 10

Proven • 1 Kings 18:25-39

Emily Beth Crews



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The song is meant to be sung as a call and response. The response to all the questions presented in the song: *He is!* He is worthy. Today we will learn how the people of Israel were given a new opportunity to choose wholehearted devotion to the one true God, rather than wafting to and fro in their faithfulness. He alone was worthy of their worship.

Futility (1 Kings 18:25-29). The prophet of God, Elijah, enters the scene in 1 Kings 17:1, and we witness how he is used by God to return the Israelites to true worship in 1 Kings 18. He could be described as a “Reformer of Israel” (Matthew Henry).

Elijah confronted 450 false prophets of the man-made god, Baal, and challenged them to prepare a sacrifice. Elijah prepared a sacrifice as well for the Lord. Whether Baal or the Lord God would respond to the sacrifice with fire, that one would be the genuine deity— the one worthy of the worship of the Israelites.

It is interesting to note here that this requirement of fire should have given Baal a greater advantage. After all, he was the god of weather including lightning. The prophets of Baal prepared the offering, sacrificed a bull, and “invoked the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, ‘Baal, answer us.’ But there was no sound and no answer” (v.26). Elijah responded to their futile actions by mocking them, “Yell louder” (v.27)!”

“The worship of idols is a most ridiculous thing, and it is but justice to represent it so and expose it to scorn. Baal’s prophets were so far from being convinced and put to shame by

the just reproach Elijah cast upon them that it made them the more violent and led them to act more ridiculously (Henry)."

The Baal prophets indeed began yelling louder and "mutilated themselves with swords and spears (v.28)." They spent the entire day calling out for Baal to bring down fire, "but there was no sound, no answer, and no response (v.29)."

This spectacle was happening before the Israelites. Elijah challenged the people earlier, "How long are you going to be paralyzed by indecision? If the Lord is the true God, then follow him, but if Baal is, follow him (v.21)!"

Preparation (1 Kings 18:30-35). Elijah called the people to him and began repairing an altar of the Lord that had been torn down previously (v.30). He took twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and fashioned the altar. He built a trench around the altar, arranged wood on the altar, and prepared a bull for sacrifice. He then had the people fill four water jars and pour the water all over the altar.

It's worth noting here that the land was in a severe drought and famine, making water scarce and difficult to obtain. The water used here probably came from the nearby sea. Elijah had the people refill the jars three times, resulting in twelve pots total water saturating the altar and making use of the trench that he had built. This was perhaps "to make the expected miracle the more illustrious (Henry)."

Response (1 Kings 18:36-39). Elijah prayed to the Lord for fire. "Answer me, O Lord, answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are the true God and that you are winning back their allegiance (v.37)." Rather than speak in a future tense, Elijah prayed actively as God was winning back the hearts of the people in that moment.

The Lord immediately sent fire that fell from heaven and entirely consumed the altar as it "licked up the water in the

trench (v.38).” The people of Israel fell prostrate at once and worshipped the Lord saying, “The Lord is the true God (v.39)!”

We read on in verse 40 that the sins of the prophets of Baal cost them their lives, and in verse 45 that the drought was lifted once the Israelites returned to the worship of the true Lord God.

Hosea 10:2 says, “Their hearts were slipping.” Consider today how your own heart might be slipping toward worship at altars the world constructs today – in some cases even the church. Refuse to hobble with uncertainty, worshipping little gods to keep in good favor with the world. Stand upright and announce with your words and actions, “He is worthy of all blessing and honor and glory!”

Emily Beth Crews currently resides in Montana but was born and raised in Mississippi. She is the daughter of regular contributor, Laura Lee Leathers.