Fire Bowl On Mt. Carmel

*YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel VS. Baal, the Storm god of Tyre & Sidon*

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday February 2nd, 2020

Text: I Kings 18:17-46

### Intro

1. Today, Sunday February 2nd is Super Bowl LIV (54) day!
   1. *Already a historic contest, whoever wins will make history!*
   2. The Chiefs haven’t been to a Super Bowl in 50 years (1970, they won Super Bowl 4!)
   3. The 49ers last went in 2013 but haven’t won since 1994 (Super Bowl 28)
   4. In all sports championships the athletes compete for a perishable prize (I Cor. 9:25).
2. There was a contest long ago, Fire Bowl on Mt. Carmel, where the prize wasn’t physical, but the very hearts, minds and souls of the people! (I Kings 18:17-46)
   1. YHWH, Lord God Almighty, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel VS. Baal, the Storm god of Tyre & Sidon!
3. This contest plays out time and time again throughout history in different ways, but is always the same: Choose between God and false gods!
4. The prize isn’t trophies, medals, money, or even the praise and adoration of men, but of life and death, the winning of hearts and minds and the saving of their souls!

#### Pre-Contest Background

* 1. I Kings 16:29-33:
     1. Ahab, the son of Omri, became king and did more evil than all who were before him. He not only walked in the sins of Jeroboam, worshiping the golden calves he set up, but continued to break the laws of God by marrying a foreign woman and serving her gods.
     2. Jezebel was a princess, the daughter of King Ethbaal I of Phoenicia (879-847/846 BC). He ruled over Tyre & Sidon, the capital city of Phoenicia.
     3. Josephus tells us *(Ant. Bk. 8, Ch. 13:1-2)* that Ethbaal I was a king-priest who reigned over the Phoenicians for 32 years.
     4. Jezebel imported her worship of the Baals and the Asherah to Israel, and Ahab built them altars and even a temple, and the people worshiped them!.
     5. “…there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him” (I Kings 21:25-26).
  2. By the names of Ahab’s sons, it would appear that he did not intend to replace the worship of Jehovah with Baal, but to worship both:
     1. Ahaziah = “The Lord sustains” (I Kings 22:40)
     2. Joram = “The Lord is exalted” (II Kings 8:16)
  3. Baal (“Lord, Master”) was worshiped in Canaan, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon (as Marduk, or Bel, sometimes called Bel-Marduk), in Greece (as Zeus), by the Romans (as Jupiter), and by the Norse (as Odin).
     1. Baal was even worshiped in N.T. times by the name of Jupiter. The Romans liked Zeus so much, they took him and made him their chief god and changed his name.
     2. Baal didn’t go away or disappear after Judah’s exile, but kept getting adopted by the global powers that came into being, until the time of the Romans.
  4. Similarities in visual perceptions of God and Baal:

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| **YHWH, Lord God Almighty** | **Baal, the storm god** |
| **Said to ride the thunderstorm as His divine chariot (Psalm 104:3-4)** | He Who Rides on the Clouds, Lord of the Heavens |
| Thunder is His voice **(**Ps**alm** 29:3-9**)** | A god of thunder (as well as fertility) |
| **Lightning, or fire, is His weapon (Psalm 18:14; 77:17; 144:6)** | As a god of thunder, hurls lightning and fire |

* + 1. Baal was said to have had all those same attributes as Jehovah.
    2. We can know what Baal was thought of through the writings of Greek mythology: Zeus, who was their rendition of Baal, was often depicted as riding a storm cloud as a chariot, hurling lightning bolts!
    3. The hearts of the people were comparing God to a fictitious being and were serving him rather than the God who not only created the earth, but who made them a nation.
  1. *I Kings 17:1-7:* Elijah suddenly appears on the scene and directly addresses King Ahab about the wrath of God to come.
     1. The punishment is famine for an undetermined period of time; apparently God let Elijah make the call, for he said “By my word.”
     2. “As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (I Kings 17:1)
     3. Elijah stressed the fact that it was God over Israel, and that He is the living God. He showed up, pronounced judgment, and then God sent him away.
  2. I Kings 18:1: The famine lasted for 3 years, and now God is sending Elijah back to Ahab.
     1. Luke 4:25-26; James 5:17: The famine was 3 years and 6 months!
  3. I Kings 18:3-16: What has Ahab been up to in the last three years?
     1. Jezebel murdered the prophets of God.
     2. Ahab scoured the countryside looking for Elijah till the nation swore they did not know where he was.
     3. Vs. 5: The famine did not move Ahab to repentance as one had done to David in II Sam. 21:1. He was looking for food for his animals, namely horses.
     4. The annals of Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria, tell us that Ahab had 2,000 chariots. That requires a lot of horses. Even in the midst of a famine over all the land, Ahab wants to preserve his military might. He put his trust in his own strength, rather than God’s.
     5. Elijah sends Obadiah to fetch King Ahab for him and promises to be there when he returns with the king.
  4. Elijah is about to face the king of Israel again!

#### The Warm-Up

* 1. I Kings 18:17-24
     1. Elijah meets with Ahab.
     2. Ahab greets Elijah by calling him the “troubler of Israel.”
     3. Neither Elijah nor the famine was the cause of trouble for Israel, but it was indeed Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel!
     4. 18:18-20: Ahab is given instruction to summon all the people of the land along with 450 prophets of Baal, as well as 400 prophets of the Asherah to Mt. Carmel.
  2. Picture yourself at Mt. Carmel:
     1. There has been a famine in all the land for 3.5 years.
     2. There is no dew in the morning, no rain; the land is brown, not green, and possibly everything looks sun-scorched.
     3. No one was unaffected; even the king had to send scouts to look for water.
     4. The rivers and brooks had dried up, and life had been miserable for 3.5 years.
     5. Now the people are gathered together, thousands of them, to witness a great contest.
     6. 18:21: People torn between two opinions (sitting on the fence, trying to serve both): YHWH or Baal as the true God.
     7. 18:22-24: The rules and the stakes laid down: Each side is to prepare an ox & lay it on the altar and are not to put fire under it, but are to call out to their God/god.
     8. Whichever one answers by fire is the true God, and the people must serve Him (vs. 21).
     9. All were in agreement (vs. 24)
  3. The contest for the hearts and minds of the people was about to begin!

#### The Coin-Toss and Kickoff

* 1. Is this a real contest if Baal is a false god?
     1. It’s a contest for the hearts & minds of the people who believed in the false god.
     2. It’s a contest of heart & mind for the false prophets of Baal & Asherah and King Ahab to keep the people worshiping their creation!
  2. The Coin-Toss:
     1. I Kings 18:25: Because of their number, Elijah lets the false prophets go first.
     2. But also for Elijah to go last and make a point by contrast.
  3. The Kick-off:
     1. I Kings 18:26-27: They called out to Baal from morning to noon.
     2. Silence.
     3. They leapt about the altar.
     4. Silence.
     5. About noon, Elijah mocked them with their own mythology, showing he had some knowledge of Baal:
        1. He told them to shout & cry out louder because, “He is a god and perhaps busy.” “Cry out louder for he may be away on a journey.” “Shout louder for he could be asleep and you need to awaken him.”
     6. Elijah’s sarcasm is met with louder shouts.
     7. Silence.
  4. The Fire Bowl has been under way for hours and no fire, and now it will take a bloody turn…

#### Half-Time

* 1. I Kings 18:28-29:
     1. From noon onward, they began to mutilate themselves with swords and lances till their blood was gushing forth, raving all the while.
     2. Still, Silence!
  2. Imagine yourself there:
     1. Watching the prophets of the god you worship raving about, shouting at the top of their lungs, stabbing and cutting themselves, all morning long till evening and no answer.
     2. No fire from Heaven.
     3. Surely a god of fire could perform such a simple task as lighting an altar on fire to vindicate his worshippers in the sight of one who mocks them.
     4. Yet there was Silence!
  3. From morning to noon, from noon to the evening the same result: Silence!

#### The Winning Score

* 1. I Kings 18:30-35: Finally after their voices gave out, they were exhausted, probably from the loss of blood; it became Elijah’s turn.
  2. Everything he does here is symbolic and to make a point.
     1. It may look like he was just quite the Showman, but all that he does next is for a reason.
     2. He first called the people to gather around him.
     3. He repaired the altar of God. They had not worshipped God in some time.
     4. He built up the altar with 12 stones, and not 10. This was the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel, but he used 12 to remind them of who they were, and of their covenant.
     5. He dug a trench around the altar.
     6. What was the greatest commodity of that particular time? Water!
     7. He orders 12 pitchers (barrels) of water to not just wet the offering, but to drench it, and to fill the trench.
     8. He wanted to show the people this was no trick, but real power.
     9. God had done this before to an offering without the water in *Lev. 9:24.*
  3. I Kings 18:36-37: It’s evening now. The people have been here practically all day.
     1. Notice the stark contrast here. The prophets of Baal had screamed for hours, from the morning to evening and received no answer.
     2. Elijah speaks once in prayer, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel…”
     3. This is to once again remind them who they are, and for them to remember His covenant with them.
     4. “…Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God…”
     5. Elijah appeals to God to show Himself to the people as being the only true God; a lesson they had forgotten! (They promised to serve Him – Josh. 24:16-27)
  4. I Kings 18:38-39:
     1. 18:38: Fire from the Lord fell from heaven and consumed everything there, including the water!
     2. 18:39: The people know the difference from what they had witnessed all day long from the false prophets, and what they have seen here: They fall to their faces praising & worshiping God.
  5. YHWH wins the contest!

#### The Post-Contest Activities

* 1. I Kings 18:40-46:
     1. Elijah orders all the false prophets killed and warns Ahab a heavy down-pour was on its way, marking the end of the famine.
  2. God demonstrated His awesome might and power to a generation of people, an idolatrous nation, who had forgotten their God.
  3. The outcome of this Great Contest still serves as example for us today: There is only one God, and it is He we are to worship.
     1. Is. 45:6: He is God; there is none beside Him.
     2. Is. 45:18-25: There is only one God, the Creator. In Him is salvation.
  4. YHWH, Lord God Almighty, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God Who created heaven and earth, and Who alone is worthy of our praise & worship!

## Conclusion

1. The contest didn’t end there on Mt. Carmel. God’s true power was not fully displayed there.
2. During the time of the Romans, when Baal was worshipped as Jupiter, and in some parts of the world still as Zeus (Acts 14:12), when the Romans worshiped a pantheon of gods, God’s power would be displayed in a contest not just against false gods, but against death, and Satan himself, on the cross of Calvary.
3. There, as the Son of God hung on a cross, crucified for the sins of the world, for you and for me, fulfilling the promise made to Abraham so long ago, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:18), the power of God was fully displayed!
   1. The power of God was made manifest in mercy, compassion, love, power and glory.
   2. When Jesus died, the veil and the rocks in the temple were torn in two; the earth shook, and the dead rose and walked into the city. A Roman centurion standing guard even said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Mt. 27:51-54)
   3. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, The Great I AM (Jn. 8:58: “…before Abraham was born, I am”) suffered in our stead for our sins, while He Himself was innocent (Rom. 5:8).
4. When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose with power and majesty, and conquered death and Satan!
   1. Rom. 6:8-10: Death no longer has any hold over Christ.
   2. Heb. 2:14-15: Jesus freed us from death, and took the power of death away from Satan.
   3. II Tim. 1:10: He abolished death to bring us eternal life.
   4. I Cor. 15:50-57: Through Christ is the victory to overcome death.
   5. From man’s darkest hour shown forth God’s brightest light!
5. After the fall of Rome, Baal ceased to exist as he had for centuries before, but not what he stood for: An alternative; a substitute.
6. Jesus Christ lives on, seated at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34), waiting on those who recognize His sovereignty to come to Him to partake of the free gift of life (Rom. 6:23).
   1. Heb. 13:8: “Jesus Christ {is} the same yesterday and today and forever.”
   2. Acts 4:12: There is salvation in no one else, no other name than Christ’s.
7. In Christ is the power of God. He is the Creator, the Savior, and to Him every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10-11)!
8. We teach the gospel to change the hearts and minds of the people today that their souls may be saved! (II Cor. 5:9-11; James 1:21)
9. Let us love and serve the One and only God, Creator of the heavens and the earth!
10. If you are not a Christian, you need to be. Love God, repent and be baptized into His name! Recognize that false gods can’t save and never have been able to!
11. If a Christian in error, don’t wait till it’s eternally too late. Love God, repent and be renewed! Remove whatever false gods stand in your way of serving God with your whole heart!
12. Whatever your requests are, let them be known ***NOW*** while we stand & sing!

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