

1 Kings 18

Elijah Confronts Ahab

After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."² So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria.³ And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly,⁴ and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.)⁵ And Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals."⁶ So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.⁷ And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"⁸ And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'"⁹ And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?"¹⁰ As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you.¹¹ And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here."' "¹² And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth.¹³ Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?¹⁴ And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"' ; and he will kill me."¹⁵ And Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today."¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah.

*¹⁷ When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"¹⁸ And he answered, "**I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house**, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals.¹⁹ Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."*

The Prophets of Baal Defeated

*²⁰ So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.²¹ And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "**How long will you go limping between two different opinions?** If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." **And the people did not answer him a word.**²² Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.²³ Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.²⁴ And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it."²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. **No one answered; no one paid attention.***

*³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. **And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down.**³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be your name,"³² 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 seahs^{al} of seed.³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull*

in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood."³⁴ And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time.³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word."³⁷ Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

The Lord Sends Rain

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain."⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.⁴³ And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times.⁴⁴ And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'"⁴⁵ And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel.⁴⁶ And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

From your memory, what has trained Elijah to know the sovereignty of God's provision?

(What happens to this in chapter 19?)

Philippians 4:10-19

God's Provision

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share^[1] my trouble.¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.^[2]¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Wait:

*Vs 1 **After many days** the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."*

Psalm 130:6 *my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.*

Psalm 123:2 *Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.*

Living in Season:

Acts 3:20²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

2 Timothy 4:2² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 KINGS 18:12¹² *And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where*

The Spirit: This is the only direct reference to the Holy Spirit in the Book of 1 Kings. Apparently the Holy Spirit sometimes transported Elijah from one location to another (see **2 Kin. 2:16**).

¹⁶ *And they said to him, "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the Lord has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send."*

Philip has a similar experience in **Acts 8:39, 40**.³⁹ *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.*⁴⁰ *But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.*

For further insights on the Holy Spirit in the kingdom period, see "The Holy Spirit at Work" in introductions to 1 Kin., 2 Kin., 1 Chr., and 2 Chr.

Etc.

- Why is Obadiah an example of risk-taking?
Note, Obadiah is a complete contrast of Ahab.
- Is Obadiah a gift of Grace to whom?
- How does Elijah draw a boundary in verses 17-19?

S/G What is satirical? Why did Elijah use this?

Baal = "rider of the clouds". Name belongs to Yahweh and He will prove it.

Ps 68:4 *Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up a song to Him who rides through the deserts; His name is the Lord; exult before Him!*

Ps 104:3 *He lays the beams of His chambers on the waters; He makes the clouds His chariot; He rides on the wings of the wind;*

Ps 147:8

He covers the heavens with clouds; He prepares rain for the earth; He makes grass grow on the hills.

18:19 Mount Carmel A mountain range that extends to the Mediterranean coast near the modern city of Haifa. This particular mountain is symbolic of fertility and grandeur (compare

Isa 35:2

it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

Jer 50:19

I will restore Israel to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead.

Towards the Israelites: 1 Kings 18:21 you go limping The Hebrew word *pasach*, denoting “pass over,” “spring over,” or “limp,” can also imply “jump” or “hop” (see v. 26).

NOTE: No one said a word. (same response to the prophets of Baal who got no answer VS 29) Between two different **opinions** The Hebrew word used here, *sa'ip*, typically refers to the boughs of a tree (Isa 17:6; Ezek 31:6, 8) or clefts in a rock (Isa 2:21; 57:5), but it also can refer to divided thoughts (Job 4:13; 20:2). The usage here creates the image of a bird hopping between branches or rock clefts.

1 Kings 18:26b-29 *But there was no voice, and no one answered [referring to Baal]. And they limped around the altar that they had made. ²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. **No one answered; no one paid attention.***

Limping used twice in satire...(vs 21 of Israelites vs 26 of prophets of Baal)

WHY WAS THIS OUTLAWED?

18:28 they cut themselves A sign of mourning and distress that was outlawed for the Israelites **Deut 14:1** “You are the sons of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.

14:1 These prohibitions are against mourning customs of the pagan cults for the dead.

14:3 The OT is not clear regarding the principle behind the selecting of **clean** and **unclean** or **detestable** animals. Some scholars think it was a matter of hygiene; others think the unclean animals were sacred to Canaanite religions. Jesus’ teaching “purifying all foods” (Mark 7:19) and God’s command to Peter to “kill and eat” unclean animals (Acts 10:13) favor the latter view.

14:21 This seems to be a clear indicator that the dietary rules presented in this chapter were not solely for hygienic purposes, but existed because God’s holy people, those set apart strictly to Him, were to be distinct in Canaan. For example, the law forbidding the boiling of **a young goat in its mother’s milk** (also given in Ex. 23:19; 34:26) existed as a rejection of a Canaanite religious rite, possibly associated with a fertility cult.¹

Lev 19:28 You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord.

Lev 21:5 They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body.

CUTTINGS IN THE FLESH (שָׂרֵת, *seret*; שָׂרֵתֶת, *sareteth*). Cutting oneself during cultic or ceremonial procedures, forbidden in Israelite law (Lev 19:28; 21:5; Ezek 9:4). Associated with idolatry and mourning (1 Kgs 18:28; Jer 16:6; 41:5; 48:37).²

¹ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Dt 14:1–21). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

² Major Contributors and Editors. (2016). *Cuttings in the Flesh*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

L/G WHAT ARE MODERN DAY EQUIVALANTS TO THIS?**What can we learn about prayer from Elijah:**

18:41 Much can be learned about prayer from observing Elijah:

First, even though we have a promise for God's provision, we are not to stop praying for its fulfillment (v. 41).

Second, we see one of the postures of prayer as we read that he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees (v. 42).

Third, we learn the importance of persistence in prayer as we read that Elijah prayed seven times (v. 43).

And **fourth**, we understand the necessity of faith as we pray by realizing that Elijah believed his prayer was answered before the answer actually came (vv. 44, 45). **James 5:17, 18** explains that the prayer of a Christian can be as effective as the prayer of Elijah.

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed **fervently** that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

1 Kings 19

Elijah Flees Jezebel

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ **Then he was afraid**, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

The Lord Speaks to Elijah

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.^[a]¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

The Call of Elisha

¹⁹ So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" ²¹ And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Elijah's Challenge: 1 Kings 18

The type of story recorded in 1 Kings 18 is called in **missiology, a challenge or ordeal**. It is very common in power encounters between God and the no-gods and even within the religions of the no-gods, themselves. The entire story is one of the outstanding examples of **literary satire in the Bible (vv. 21–40)**.

First, we have Elijah's challenge to God's rebellious people (v. 21f). A paraphrase of his words in verse 22 would be "At this moment on this hilltop I stand alone with God."

Second, Elijah sets up the "ordeal" (vv. 23–24). It is accepted by the people. One wonders if the pagan prophets wanted this to happen! It is doubtful.

Third, the intensification of the satire is described (vv. 25–29). Animal blood sacrifice is involved, a common feature in animism (vv. 25,26a). The intensity of the religious fanaticism of the pagan prophets is graphically revealed (vv. 26–29). They continue from morning till the hour of the evening sacrifice, the ninth hour, or 3:00 P.M.

Fourth, Elijah acts to reformulate the faith they had abandoned. He rebuilds the partly destroyed "altar of the LORD" (v. 30). This symbolizes a return to the historical point when God first called them as a nation. It is a return to the faith of their fathers from which they had strayed. **It is an act of rededication.**

We next notice the aggressive steps taken by Elijah:

He dramatizes the situation with all physical factors set against him (vv. 32–35). He waits till the right moment, the time of the evening sacrifice, as a further reminder of the faith they have abandoned (v. 36a). He then declares the motive for the ordeal or challenge and that he acts only in the name of the Lord (v. 36b). Next, Elijah prays, publicly (v. 37). He goes "out on a limb," so to speak. God has to answer or Elijah is revealed as a false prophet. Then God would be no different than Baal and Asherah. Power encounters provoked by God's servants are acts of great faith.

Then the climax of the action is reached in verse 38. God answers with fire in the most dramatic way possible. The divine fire consumes Elijah's sacrifice. It burns up "the wood and the stones and the dust." It even "licked up the water that was in the trench" (v. 38).

Finally, the purpose of power encounter and trial by ordeal must always be kept in view. It does not serve just to validate the authority of God's servant, though that, too, usually occurs. It is meant *to lead people to a verdict, to a decision*. We find that in verse 39: "and when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.' "

A summary of what has occurred would be:

The issue: God's people had left Him for the "no-gods."

The ordeal: The true God will vindicate His name and that of His servant.

The reformulation of the faith (vv. 30–32).

The motive (v. 36–37).

The climax (v. 38).

The verdict (v. 39).

The verdict results in a people movement leading to two acts: the altar of the Lord is rebuilt (vv. 30–32a); and the false prophets are put to death (v. 40).

CONFLICT WITH THE GODS AMONG THE WRITING PROPHETS

I will give one classic story of power encounter among the writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi are the writing prophets; Abraham, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and others like them are often considered the non-writing prophets). The passage is Isaiah 57:1–21.

In the story Isaiah speaks and God speaks. It is difficult to know when one begins, leaves off, and the other begins.

First is described the sufferings of the unnamed "righteous man" (v. 1a). He could represent Isaiah himself. More likely he represents all the righteous in Judah who remain true to God. They are suffering at the hands of the apostate Jews and possibly

some of the pagans of the land. Some were even killed for their faith (vv. 1b–2). This is the concept of “againstness,” another key power encounter concept. It is the “for and against” motif found all through Scripture and church history.

Second, the opposing pagan cult is described exactly like the Canaanite cults we have already examined (v. 3f). It is led by a woman (v. 3). This, too, is common. She is a sorceress, who leads the people into sexual orgies. She is herself a cult prostitute (v. 3). The ones called the “sons” of this woman are the Jews who are involved in the cult with her.

Third, the Jews involved were totally given over to the cult. They were in rebellion against Isaiah and the righteous men who were trying to turn them from their apostasy. The rebellious Jews were using mockery (“jest”); verbal defiance (“open wide your mouth”); ridicule (“stick out your tongue”); and deceit. They were both deceived and, in turn, were deceivers (v. 4).

Fourth, the religious orgies (“inflamm yourselves”) were carried out in the sacred groves spoken of all through the Old Testament (v. 5a). What was done was done in the open and in groups. This was a key cultural feature of this abomination.

Fifth, near to the oaks were the Tophets (if the burial also took place there) where they sacrificed their children to the gods. This was done in wadis (small ravines) and in openings in the rocks (v. 5b), where the flame would not burn the “luxuriant” trees. The children were first killed by stabbing with a knife. Then their bodies were offered as burnt offerings to the gods.

This is Canaanite religion at its worst. It is also Jewish apostasy at its lowest point. In such practices demonic powers are present. Probably almost all, if not all, of these occult, satanic worshippers were severely demonized.

Sixth, stones were involved (v. 6a), usually of five types. One, a sacred stone was often set up. Idols or images of Baal and Astarte were placed on the stone. Two, altars were constructed of stones. Incense, libations, even the children’s blood were offered upon the stone altars. Three, stone monuments to the gods or goddesses were often set up. Four, stones as phallic symbols were common. Five, any unusual stone, rock, or rock formation was looked upon as either filled with impersonal power, or as the dwelling place of spirits.

The second part of Isaiah 57:6 makes it clear the stones were considered sacred. The stones themselves received the libations to the gods and spirits poured out upon them. Also, the grain offerings were placed upon them to be burned or left there for the gods to use (v. 6c).

Seventh, the groves were located on mountain tops or high places (v. 7a). Pagan ceremonies occurring on “high places” are very prominent in the Old Testament. There are dozens of references to them, especially in the historical books. The first references are in the Pentateuch, however. The one in Leviticus 26:30 provides the context for all such future references. There God warns Israel of the consequences of disobedience to his laws. He says, “I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols; for My soul shall abhor you.”

There, on the high places, “you have made your bed,” Isaiah says. This probably refers to cult sexual practices including prostitution and ritual sexual acts. Did this also involve Satanic Ritual Abuse, as in today’s revival of paganism? This is difficult to say. Some of the cult prostitutes were given to this form of prostitution by their parents as adolescent children and perhaps even before. So SRA could possibly have occurred. The high places were also the places where their sacrifices were offered.

Eighth, some sort of symbol of the deity seems implied in verse 8a, “and behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your sign.” This may have been a secret, magical symbol hidden behind doors or in a concealed place in a doorpost. The individual would return to that magical symbol or spirit sign to gain new power. All pagan religion is a power game.

Ninth, all this was done by God’s people “far removed from Me,” the Lord says (v. 8b).

Tenth, the sexual perversions of this cultic system are again mentioned (v. 8c). They were evidently the most prominent feature of the cult. This is seen in several features here. One, there is the prior reference to “inflamm yourselves among the oaks” (v. 5a). Next is “you have uncovered yourself” (v. 8c). This is followed by the reference to their “bed” (v. 8c).

Also we find “you have made an agreement for yourselves with them,” that is, the temple prostitutes (v. 8d). Then we have, “You have looked on their manhood” (v. 8d). Was this a phallic symbol? Or was this homosexual prostitution? The latter is a strong possibility (see Deut. 23:17).

Eleventh, they exported their practices to others, far and wide (v. 9). In doing so, they were leading themselves and those they enticed to follow their wicked ways “down to Sheol,” that is, to death (v. 9b).

Twelfth, the next verse seems to imply this unrestrained evil lifestyle wore them out. It was personally costly. Yet they continued with it, renewing their strength but only for continued evil (v. 10).

Thirteenth, God says they were liars and had so totally forgotten God that they did not give him a thought when worry and fear gripped their hearts. They simply went back to their decadent practices. Their “deeds” and “righteousness” are of such a perverted sort: it brings them no profit, only shame (vv. 11–12).

Fourteenth, God challenges and warns the rebellious Jews, “When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you” (v. 13a). God then contrasts himself with their gods who are so unstable “a breath will take them away.” In contrast God is a faithful refuge (v. 13b).

Finally, God promises that if they humble themselves and come back to Him, He will forgive, bless, and restore them. If not, they will never find peace (vv. 14–21).

What a remarkable passage of Scripture! How deep, however, was Israel’s involvement with evil spirits in the days of Isaiah! A similar picture is found in Jeremiah and several of the other prophets who wrote just before and during the time of the Exile.

The Case of Job

There remain other significant Old Testament stories with a strong spiritual warfare motif. The story of Job and Satan’s attack upon him will be referred to several times in our New Testament studies. The main focus of Job 1–2 is the direct role Satan has in the sufferings of this man of God. Satan is behind all the sufferings and losses suffered by Job.

The attacks are varied. First is the attack through evil men (1:13–15). Second is a natural disaster that destroyed all Job’s sheep and killed all but one of his servants. The surviving servant called the disaster “the fire of God” (v. 16). Yet it did not come from God but from Satan.

The third is another attack from hostile men, in which Job’s camels are stolen and his servants killed (v. 17). The fourth is another natural disaster which kills all of all his sons and daughters (vv. 18–19).

Satan, not God, is involved in all these tragedies suffered by Job. Satan manipulates evil men, this we have always known to be true. Is he also the direct cause of all natural disasters, except those which are clearly sent by God to judge sinful men? Most tragic of all is the sudden death of all of Job’s children. Can Satan take the lives of the children of God’s children? According to Job’s story, Satan can do all of the above, but only with God’s permission.

In Job 2, it is Job himself who is attacked. Satan is given permission to cause all manner of physical evils to befall him, short of taking his life. God tells Satan “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life” (2:6). His life is spared but not the life of his children. Most good parents would gladly give their life for that of their children. There are great mysteries here yet to be pondered.

When we come to Satan’s attempts to accuse Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:1–4, God immediately stops him (v. 2). Evidently God only allows some of his faithful servants to be accused and abused by Satan but not others. God is sovereign in all things, even in His handling of Satan and evil.

The Case of Hosea

Most of the remaining major spiritual warfare passages in the Old Testament are dealt with elsewhere in our studies. I will, however, close this chapter with the Book of Hosea. It is a good summary of God’s polemic with Israel and Judah for their flagrant “harlotry” in forsaking the Lord. Hosea gives a most thorough and heart-rending picture of the apostasy of God’s people. The main focus is on the nation’s harlotry with the idols of the land and with Baal in particular.

The word *harlot* is mentioned ten times, the word *harlotry* nine, an unusual concentration of references for a book of its size. The book primarily has spiritual harlotry in view even when it refers to the prophet’s harlot wife. In addition are the six appearances of the word *lovers*, again with spiritual adultery in view. *Idols* are mentioned seven times; *Baal* and *Baals* seven times.

Some key verses are: “I will punish her for the days of the Baals when she used to offer sacrifice to them” (2:13a). Israel is accused of following “her lovers, so that she forgot Me,” declares the LORD” (2:13b). “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone,” God says (4:17). Next God says, “The men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifice with temple prostitutes” (4:14b). “They play the harlot continually” (4:18).

God then follows with, “My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner’s wand informs them; for a spirit of harlotry has led them astray” (4:12). “For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God. You have loved harlots’ earnings on every threshing floor,” that is, in ritual sexual harvest orgies (9:1).

“They came to Baal-peor,” God continues, “and devoted themselves to shame, and they became as detestable as that which they loved” (9:10). “Israel made the sacred pillars,” or phallic symbols (10:1–2).

Most amazing are God’s cries of both love and lament for his wayward people. He promises that they will return to Him as the result of the terrible punishment He must allow to fall upon them. “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? . . . My heart is turned over within Me. All my compassions are kindled” (11:8). What a loving God we have!

This concludes our spiritual warfare overview of the Old Testament. Much yet remains to be said. The New Testament will build upon and greatly expand what we have discovered in the Old Testament. If we seem to have a scarcity of direct references to Satan and demons in the Old Testament, the opposite is true in the New Testament. The Gospels truly present a picture of demons everywhere.³

18:1–19 The account of Ahab’s reign is intertwined with the account of Elijah’s prophetic activities. The story of Elijah confronting Ahab sets the stage for a contest between Yahweh and Baal, the Canaanite storm god. Israel’s worship of Baal is attributed to king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, who instituted Baal worship on a national level (16:31–32).

Pagan Deities in the Old Testament Table

18:1 Ahab See 16:29–34.

I may give rain on the surface of the earth See note on 17:1.

18:2 Samaria The capital city established under Ahab’s father, Omri (see note on 16:24).

18:3 Obadiah The Obadiah who prophesied against Edom, whose oracles appear in the book of Obadiah, is likely a different person.

over the house Refers to the royal residence in Samaria. It is unclear what responsibilities Obadiah’s position entailed; it was likely the highest attainable office in the ancient Near East, making Obadiah second only to King Ahab (Gen 39:4–5; 41:40–45; 1 Kgs 4:6; 2 Kgs 15:5; Isa 22:15–24).

18:4 cave The Hebrew word here suggests a specific cave or set of caves. Since the following scene occurs on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:19–40), tradition holds that the cave(s) of the prophets were in the Carmel mountain range.

18:5 horses and mules See note on 1:33.

18:7 he recognized him Elijah was recognizable because he wore a hairy garment with a leather belt (2 Kgs 1:8).

³ Murphy, E. F. (1996). [Handbook for spiritual warfare](#) (pp. 254–258). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

my lord Elijah Obadiah’s position over the king’s household made him second only to Ahab (1 Kgs 18:3). Referring to Elijah as “lord” or “master” suggests that Obadiah willingly subjected himself to the prophet, despite being Elijah’s superior.

18:9 to kill me Obadiah expresses this fear three times (vv. 9, 12, 14).

18:10 As Yahweh your God lives A formula indicating that a formal oath will follow.

he would make the kingdom or the nation swear Since Elijah’s words threatened Ahab’s regime, the king could call upon his allies to search for Elijah and extradite him. Ancient Near Eastern treaty texts often included a clause requiring the extradition of runaway slaves or fugitives wanted for inciting rebellion, such as Elijah (2:39–40).

18:12 the Spirit of Yahweh The Hebrew word used here, *ruach*, means “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit,” which fits with the idea of Yahweh’s Spirit carrying someone from one location (or activity) to another—it can move them and be in them. This verse foreshadows Elijah’s ascent in the whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:1–12).

18:15 As Yahweh of hosts lives A formula indicating that a formal oath will follow.

As Yahweh of hosts A common title for God used by the prophets. The Hebrew word term used here, *yhwh tseva’ot* (literally rendered as “Yahweh of armies”), portrays Yahweh as the commander of either Israel’s army or the heavenly hosts.

before whom I stand The idea is that Elijah serves the Lord.

18:17 this you who throws Israel into confusion Ahab later greets Elijah by saying, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” (1 Kgs 21:20).

throws Israel into confusion The Hebrew word used here, *okheri*, denotes the idea of causing a disturbance or stirring up trouble.

18:18 Baals Refers to various renderings of the Canaanite storm god, Baal. The plural form of *ba’al* (*ba’alim*) is used only here in the book of Kings. It also appears in Judges (see Judg 2:11; 3:7; 8:33; 10:6, 10) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:4; 12:10).

Pagan Deities in the Old Testament Table

Deity	Country
Asherah	Canaan
Baal	Canaan
Chemosh	Moab
Molech	Ammon

18:19 Mount Carmel A mountain range that extends to the Mediterranean coast near the modern city of Haifa. This particular mountain is symbolic of fertility and grandeur (compare Isa 35:2; Jer 50:19).

18:20–40 First Kings 18:20–40 records the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The miraculous burning of the sacrifice to Yahweh serves a double purpose: It turns Israel’s heart back to Him and results in the deaths of 450 prophets of Baal.

18:21 you go limping The Hebrew word *pasach*, denoting “pass over,” “spring over,” or “limp,” can also imply “jump” or “hop” (see v. 26).

~~**opinions** The Hebrew word used here, *sa'ip*, typically refers to the boughs of a tree (Isa 17:6; Ezek 31:6, 8) or clefts in a rock (Isa 2:21; 57:5), but it also can refer to divided thoughts (Job 4:13; 20:2). The usage here creates the image of a bird hopping between branches or rock clefts.~~

Baal The Canaanite storm god.

18:22 alone am left a prophet An exaggeration, since 100 of Yahweh’s prophets have already been mentioned (1 Kgs 18:4, 13), and other prophets of Yahweh are mentioned later (20:13; 22:1–28).

18:24 you call on the name of your god Assumes that all the people of Israel worship Baal.

18:26 they limped about the altar Possibly refers to a ritual dance.

Altars in the Old Testament Table

which they had made This was probably not an active religious site, since the prophets had to build the altar for this contest.

~~**18:28 they cut themselves** A sign of mourning and distress that was outlawed for the Israelites (Deut 14:1; Lev 19:28; 21:5).~~

18:30 He repaired the altar of Yahweh that had been destroyed The people of Israel apparently had disassembled the altars of Yahweh throughout the land (1 Kings 19:10).

18:31 Elijah took twelve stones Marks the participation of the “original” Israel—the 12 tribes that were divided into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

18:38 the fire of Yahweh Fire often symbolizes Yahweh’s presence (Exod 3:2; 19:18; Lev 9:24; 2 Chr 7:3), divine approval (Judg 6:21; 1 Chr 21:26; 2 Chr 7:1), and divine judgment (Num 11:1; 16:35).

Fire as a Motif of Divine Presence

18:40 the wadi of Kishon The Wadi Kishon gathers the runoff from the many springs and streams in the Jezreel Valley and directs the waters west, past Mount Carmel and into the Mediterranean Sea.

18:41–46 After three years of drought (1 Kgs 18:1), Elijah intercedes and rain returns to the land.

18:41 Ahab Ahab was silent during the challenge to Baal’s prophets (vv. 20–40).

18:43 go They may ascend to a different peak; Elijah and his servant are already on top of Mount Carmel (v. 42).

18:46 the hand of Yahweh A phrase used to indicate an extreme sensory experience (see Ezek 1:3).

ran before Ahab Elijah miraculously outruns Ahab’s chariot.⁴

18:1 After nearly three years of drought, the looming question of whether it was the Lord God of Israel or Baal who controlled the rain was about to be answered in a contest on Mt. Carmel.

18:3 The **Obadiah** mentioned here was certainly a believer in the Lord, but he is not the prophet Obadiah who authored the biblical book by that name.

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (1 Ki 18:1–46). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

18:12 ~~The Spirit: This is the only direct reference to the Holy Spirit in the Book of 1 Kings. Apparently the Holy Spirit sometimes transported Elijah from one location to another (see 2 Kin. 2:16). Philip has a similar experience in Acts 8:39, 40. For further insights on the Holy Spirit in the kingdom period, see “The Holy Spirit at Work” in introductions to 1 Kin., 2 Kin., 1 Chr., and 2 Chr.~~

18:17 Elijah was quick to clear the record. The drought was not his fault; instead it had resulted from Ahab’s failure to acknowledge the Lord and his allowing himself and all Israel to be seduced into Baal worship by Jezebel.

18:19 Elijah was calling for a showdown between their god and the Lord. All Israel was to observe the contest between Elijah and the prophets who were cared for and protected by Jezebel. **Baal** was the chief male deity of the Canaanites and Phoenicians. He symbolized the productive forces of nature. **Asherah** was the wife of Baal in Canaanite mythology.

18:20 The contest was to take place on **Mount Carmel**, a prominent peak in a range of mountains stretching southeast from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. On this mountain Canaanites built sanctuaries to pagan weather deities. This was the ideal place for a confrontation to show the superiority of the Lord over Baal.

18:21 The classic challenge of Elijah, **How long will you falter**, betrays the double-mindedness of the people. They must follow the Lord wholeheartedly or not at all.

18:22 By human reasoning, the odds of 450 to 1 would be nearly impossible. Yet nothing is impossible with the Lord God of Israel!

18:26 The prophets of Baal had spent six hours crying out to their god with no response.

18:36 The time of the *evening sacrifice* was about 3:00 P.M.

18:41 Much can be learned about prayer from observing Elijah: First, even though we have a promise for God’s provision, we are not to stop praying for its fulfillment (v. 41). Second, we see one of the postures of prayer as we read that **he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees** (v. 42). Third, we learn the importance of persistence in prayer as we read that Elijah prayed **seven times** (v. 43). And fourth, we understand the necessity of faith as we pray by realizing that Elijah believed his prayer was answered before the answer actually came (vv. 44, 45). James 5:17, 18 explains that the prayer of a Christian can be as effective as the prayer of Elijah.

18:45 The coming of the rain was the final proof that Baal was impotent and that the Lord God of Israel was supreme.

18:46 Elijah was divinely empowered by **the hand of the LORD** to outrun Ahab’s chariot from Carmel to Jezreel, a distance of approximately 25 miles. The phrase “the hand of the LORD” is a formula that refers to the divine inspiration of the prophets and probably is an indirect reference to the Holy Spirit (compare 2 Kin. 3:15 and Ezek. 1:3 with 1 Sam. 10:6, 10 and 19:20, 23). Here Elijah was supernaturally strengthened by the Spirit of God to do a miraculous feat. Read Judg. 14:6, 9 and 15:14 for similar accounts. For more on the work of the Holy Spirit in 1 Kin., see note on 18:12.⁵

18:1–46 Choosing the Real King

For three years Ahab and his servant Obadiah desperately sought the elusive Elijah. Elijah unexpectedly met Obadiah in the road and promised Obadiah that he would see the king. When Ahab met the prophet, he called Elijah the “troubler of Israel” (18:17). Yet it was Ahab who caused Israel’s distress. Elijah proposed a contest with the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel.

The contest was for the benefit of the people to learn who truly ruled Israel—the Baals of Ahab and Jezebel or the LORD God of their fathers. The contest consisted of preparing a sacrifice and praying for the

⁵ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Ki 18:1–46). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

deity to prove his existence by answering with fire from heaven. Baal was reputed to be the god of storm and therefore should at least have been able to bring down fire (lightning).

The prophets of Baal prayed all morning, but there was no answer. Elijah ridiculed their pagan theology. Then in ecstatic frenzy they frantically slashed themselves to draw their god's attention (compare Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1), but there was no answer. At the evening hour of sacrifice, it was Elijah's turn. He rebuilt the altar of the LORD and called upon God, identifying Him as the "God of Abraham, Isaac and *Israel*" (1 Kgs 18:36). Fire fell and the people exclaimed, "The LORD—he is God!" (18:39). The people executed the evil prophets (18:20–40).

God also sent a great rainstorm to end the drought. The storm rained upon Ahab as he hurried to Jezreel. The hand of the LORD empowered Elijah to run ahead of Ahab's chariot to the city (18:41–46).⁶

19:1–21 Elijah Hides at Horeb

Elijah's victory, however, turned into fear and depression. Surprisingly, Jezebel was not intimidated by Ahab's report of Elijah's deeds. She vowed to kill the prophet, who ran again but this time away from Jezebel to the desert. In despair the prophet prayed to die (compare Num 11:11–15; Job 6:8–9; Jonah 4:8). The angel of the LORD strengthened him with food, and he journeyed forty days and nights to a cave at Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:1–9a). It was upon the same Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai, that the LORD had revealed Himself to Moses (compare Exod 3; 19).

Elijah complained that the Israelites had abandoned God and that he was the last prophet of the LORD. But Elijah was mistaken. God brought in succession a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire to ravage the mountain. But the prophet did not hear God in these events. Instead, Elijah heard the LORD in a small whisper. By this the prophet learned that sometimes God works in quiet ways (19:9b–14).

There were in fact seven thousand who had not worshiped Baal. God sent Elijah to anoint three men who would ultimately destroy Ahab's house—Hazeal of Aram, Jehu of Israel, and the prophet Elisha (19:15–18). The call of Elisha was the beginning of a large school of prophets (19:19–21; compare 2 Kgs 6:1–2).⁷

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Mount Carmel is best known as the site of Elijah's dramatic contest against 850 pagan prophets (1 Kgs 18:20–46). The three-year-long drought Elijah had announced (1 Kgs 17:1) is most commonly understood as an implicit challenge to Baal, the storm god (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 209). Since withholding rain is listed in Deuteronomy as a curse for following other gods (Deut 11:16–17; 28:23–24), the drought might have functioned as Yahweh's judgment on the people of Israel for their idolatry under Ahab (Brueggemann, *I & 2 Kings*, 209).

After three years of drought, Elijah summoned the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to assemble on Mount Carmel in the presence of all the people (1 Kgs 18:18–19). Elijah accused the people of "limping between two different opinions" (1 Kgs 18:21, ESV) and challenged the prophets to a contest: Whichever god sent fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice on the altar would be affirmed as the true god. The prophets called on Baal and danced around the altar all day without any response. They even resorted to cutting themselves with swords and lances (1 Kgs 18:28), apparently a ritual attempt to restore power to Baal, who was thought to be trapped in the underworld (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 228).

In the evening, Elijah rebuilt the ruined altar to Yahweh, symbolizing the rededication of Israel to Yahweh (Roberts, "God, Prophet, and King," 637). Elijah dug a trench around the altar and poured 12 jars of water on the sacrifice, the wood, and the altar, filling the trench. Finally, he called on Yahweh, who answered him immediately with fire that consumed not only the sacrifice, but also the water, the wood, and even the stones of the altar (1 Kgs 18:38). Upon seeing the fire, the people fell on their faces and confessed, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!" (1 Kgs 18:39, NIV). At Elijah's command, the people slaughtered all the prophets of Baal in the Kishon Valley. Elijah commanded Ahab to eat and drink at the top of Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:41), perhaps indicating a feast to renew the covenant with the

⁶ Dockery, D. S. (Ed.). (1992). *Holman Bible Handbook* (p. 256). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁷ Dockery, D. S. (Ed.). (1992). *Holman Bible Handbook* (p. 256). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Lord (Roberts, “God, Prophet, and King,” 644). As Elijah knelt on the top of the mountain to pray, a rain cloud appeared, the sky became dark, and heavy rains fell (1 Kgs 18:42–45).

Other References

Elijah’s successor, Elisha, visited Mount Carmel several times (2 Kgs 2:25; 4:25), apparently using it as a place of spiritual retreat. Mount Carmel also is mentioned several times in Old Testament poetry as an example of natural beauty and fertility (Song 7:5; Isa 35:2; Jer 46:18; 50:19). In the prophetic writings, God’s fiery wrath is said to make even a place as green as Mount Carmel wither (Amos 1:2; 9:3; see also Isa 33:9; Nah 1:4; Niehaus, “Amos,” 338).⁸

4. *Elijah’s Challenge to the Priests of Baal (18:1–19)*

18:1–6 Three years after Elijah left Israel, and three and a half years after the drought had begun (Luke 4:25), the prophet was instructed to appear before **Ahab**—an action that, humanly speaking, was extremely dangerous. So **severe** was the **famine** that **Ahab** and his steward, **Obadiah** (not the prophet who wrote the book of Obadiah), had searched **the land** for **grass** to feed the animals. (It was this **Obadiah** who had saved **one hundred prophets** of the Lord when **Jezebel** had murdered some and was seeking to exterminate others.)

18:7–15 While **Obadiah was on his** search for grass, **Elijah met him** and ordered him to notify **Ahab** of Elijah’s whereabouts. Obadiah feared that this would result in his death, since Ahab had been searching relentlessly for Elijah in order to silence him once and for all. If Obadiah revealed Elijah’s presence, the king would undoubtedly respond. But by then **the Spirit of the LORD** might have carried Elijah away. Then Ahab would **kill** Obadiah for his “false” report. And besides all this, Obadiah’s position in the royal court was already precarious because he had protected **the LORD’s prophets**. Elijah promised that he would not leave the place, and a meeting was then arranged.

18:16–19 King Ahab went to meet Elijah and accused him of being a **troubler of Israel**, not realizing that the man of God was one of the best friends **Israel** ever had. Not fearing for his own life, Elijah answered Ahab fearlessly and accusingly. He blamed the king for mixing the worship of Jehovah with **Baal**-worship and challenged him to assemble his idolatrous **prophets** for a contest **on Mount Carmel** to determine who was the true God. (**The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal** went to **Carmel**, but **the four hundred prophets of Asherah** did not; cf. vv. 19, 22.)

5. *Elijah’s Victory over the Priests of Baal (18:20–40)*

18:20–25 Addressing the assembled representatives of Israel, Elijah accused them of wavering between two opinions; they should choose either **the LORD** or **Baal**. Then the contest began. **Two bulls** were to be killed and laid **on kindling wood**. **Elijah** would represent **the LORD**, whereas **four hundred and fifty** of Ahab’s **prophets** would represent **Baal**. **The God who answered by fire** would be acknowledged as the true **God**.

18:26–29 The prophets of Baal cried out to their god and hopped around **the altar from morning ... till noon**. **Elijah mocked them** with “helpful” excuses for Baal’s failure to answer. “Perhaps he was such a small, weak god that he could not do two things at once.” In desperation, **they ... cut themselves (as was their custom)** with **knives and lances** and raved on **until the time ... of the evening sacrifice**. **But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention**.

18:30–35 Then **Elijah ... built an altar** of **twelve stones in the name of the LORD**, representing the twelve **tribes of Israel**. Then, to eliminate any possibility that the altar might be ignited in any way other than by a miracle, he saturated the oxen and the wood with twelve barrels of **water (four waterpots emptied three times)**.

⁸ Otten, J. D. (2016). [Carmel, Mount](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Some wonder how Elijah obtained so much water during a time of drought. But this is not a real difficulty. Twelve barrels of water is not an impossible amount during drought time. The drought had affected farmlands, but drinking water must have been obtainable or else everyone would have died. Another explanation is that this water could have come from the Mediterranean Sea, a few miles away. Williams says:

The Kishon (v. 40), the sea (v. 43), and a well which still exists could severally or collectively supply the water needed to fill the trench (v. 35).

18:36–40 At the time of ... the evening sacrifice, ... Elijah prayed that God would reveal himself by sending fire from heaven. Immediately **the fire of the LORD fell** from heaven, consuming not only the **sacrifice** but also **the wood and the stones and the dust, and ... the water ... in the trench** around the altar. **The people** were thus compelled to acknowledge **the LORD** as the real **God**. Then they obeyed Elijah's order to slay **the wicked prophets of Baal**. Only after the people *acknowledged* that Jehovah was God and *executed* the prophets of Baal could the rain come. Confession of sin and obedience to the Word of God are the steps to blessing.

6. *Elijah's Prayer for Rain (18:41–46)*

The prophet advised **Ahab** to eat a meal because he would soon have to leave Mount Carmel to escape the oncoming **rain**. While **Ahab** sat down to eat, **Elijah** rose up to pray. He ascended **to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed down on the ground with his face between his knees**, and fervently asked the Lord to fulfill His word by sending rain. He continued in prayer until **his servant** reported a tiny **cloud** on the horizon. That was enough for Elijah. He immediately sent word **to Ahab** to make haste for **Jezebel**, a city in Issachar where the royal family lived at times (21:1). As a loyal subject and faithful servant, the prophet **ran** before Ahab's chariot in a drenching **rain** twenty miles **to Jezebel**.

7. *Elijah's Flight to Horeb (19:1–18)*

19:1–4 When **Ahab** told **Jezebel** of the defeat and death of **the prophets** of Baal on Mount Carmel, she swore that she would slay **Elijah** within a day. Then the prophet whose faith had gained such a mighty victory the previous day lost courage. He **ran for his life** from Jezebel, south across the land **to Beersheba**, about one hundred miles away, at the southern boundary of **Judah**. Leaving **his servant** at **Beersheba**, Elijah continued south **a day's journey into the wilderness**. At length he rested **under a broom tree**, despondent, defeated, and depressed.

19:5–8 It is interesting to notice God's treatment for this severe depression: rest; food and drink; more rest; more food and drink. Thus fortified, the prophet traveled **in the strength of that food** 200 miles in **forty days and ... nights** to Mount **Horeb** (Sinai), where God had given the law to Moses.

19:9–14 There in **a cave ... the LORD** dealt with him. In a self-righteous spirit, Elijah protested his own faithfulness and denounced **the children of Israel**. He said in effect that he was the only one who had remained true to the Lord. God then commanded him to **stand on the mountain** of the law, but Elijah did not obey. We know this because later (v. 13) **he went out and stood in the entrance of the cave**. In rapid succession **the mountains** were visited by **a great ... wind, an earthquake, and a fire**. These violent storms must have reminded Elijah of his harsh, censorious spirit. None of them brought him out of the cave. Finally, **after the fire** the prophet heard **a still, small voice**. It was this gracious voice of the Lord which brought him to **the entrance of the cave**. There he again exalted himself as God's sole remaining witness. George Williams comments:

Had his heart not been occupied with self, he would have learned that tempests, earthquakes and fires cannot accomplish what the gentle voice of love can. He should have recognized that there

was no difference between his heart and that of the nation; and, that as coercion failed to make him leave his cave, so it failed, and must fail, to compel men to leave their sins.

19:15–18 It seems that Elijah’s usefulness as a servant of God suffered when he adopted this attitude of self-importance. God told him to return north **to the Wilderness of Damascus**, where he would conduct three anointings: (1) He would **anoint Hazael** to be **king over Syria**. The disobedient nation of Israel would be punished by this king. (2) He would **anoint Jehu** to be **king over Israel**. Jehu would execute God’s judgment on the house of Ahab. (3) He would **anoint ... Elisha** as his own successor. This would teach him that he was not indispensable. These three men would execute God’s judgment on idolaters in Israel (v. 17), but the Lord would leave **seven thousand** who had **not bowed** the knee **to Baal** or **kissed him**.

8. *Elijah’s Appointment of Elisha (19:19–21)*

19:19 **Elijah** traveled north to Abel Meholah, in the Jordan Valley near Beth Shean. There he **found Elisha**, a farmer **plowing** in the field. The fact that Elisha had **twelve yoke of oxen** indicates that he was not poor. He was probably plowing with one yoke and his servants with the other eleven. **Elijah threw his mantel on Elisha**, a sign that Elisha was to be his successor.

19:20, 21 Elisha asked permission to return home and make a farewell feast for his family. Elijah gave consent but warned him not to forget what had just happened to him—i.e., how Elijah had anointed him. After a sumptuous feast, Elisha **arose and followed Elijah and became his personal servant**.

Elisha’s request to say goodbye to his parents sounds dangerously like that of a would-be disciple whom Jesus pronounced unfit for the kingdom (Luke 9:61, 62). The difference is that in Elisha’s case it was a nonsense decision to sever ties immediately, whereas in the other case it was a delaying tactic and an excuse.⁹

OBLATION Gift offered at an altar or shrine, especially a voluntary gift not involving blood. KJV used “oblation” to translate four Hebrew words. Modern translations often replace “oblation” with either “offering” (Lev. 7:38; Isa. 1:13; Ezek. 44:30) or “gifts,” sometimes “contributions” (2 Chron. 31:14; Ezek. 20:40). RSV used “oblation” only at 1 Kings 18:29, 36 where it replaced the “sacrifice” of the KJV, NIV, and NASB. See *Sacrifice and Offering*.¹⁰

SACRIFICE AND OFFERING Physical elements the worshiper brings to the Deity to express devotion, thanksgiving, or the need for forgiveness.

Ancient Near East Israel was not unique among the nations of the ancient Near East in their use of sacrifices and offerings as a means of religious expression. Some type of sacrificial system characterized the many religious methodologies that the nations employed in their attempts to honor their gods. The presence of sacrifices and offerings in Israel, therefore, was not unique to Israel.

Many references to the offering of sacrifices exist in extrabiblical literature. The primary approach to the gods was through the sacrificial system. In Babylon part of the ritual of purifying the temple of Bel for the New Year festival involved the slaughter of a ram. The animal was decapitated and the priest, in turn, used the body in the purification ceremony. The ram’s body then was thrown into the river. The ritual accompanying the replacing of the head of the kettledrum that was used in the temple required that a black bull be selected for sacrifice. After an elaborate ceremony that culminated in the sacrifice of the bull, its hide was dipped in and rubbed with two separate mixtures and then used to cover the kettledrum.

⁹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 379–382). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., & Butler, T. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Oblation*. In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1207). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

While the above sacrifices were performed on special occasions, a variety of rams, bulls, and birds were offered as meals to the idols on a daily basis. Barley beer, mixed beer, milk, and wine also were placed before the deities, as well as loaves of bread.

The sacrifices and offerings were designed to serve the gods by meeting any physical need that they might have had. The sacrifices were the food and drink of the gods. Faithfulness to the preparation and presentation of them was an act of devotion.

Old Testament From the earliest times of the OT, sacrifice was practiced. Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord from the produce of the land and from the first born of the flock (Gen. 4). Upon disembarking from the ark after the great flood, Noah immediately built an altar and offered burnt sacrifices. These were a soothing aroma to the Lord (Gen. 8). Other ancient Near Eastern flood stories have parallels to this act by Noah. The patriarchal stories in Gen. 12–50 are filled with instances of sacrifice to God. The most famous is that of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22).

An organized system of sacrifice does not appear in the OT until after the exodus of Israel from Egypt. In the instructions given for the building of the tabernacle and the establishment of a priestly organization, sacrifices were to be used in the consecration or ordination of the priests (Exod. 29). A bull was slaughtered as a sin offering. Other sacrifices provided Aaron and his sons a holy meal. These sacrifices were repeated each day for a week as a part of the “ordination” of the priests. The altar itself was consecrated through the offering of two lambs and a grain offering and a libation or “drink offering” (a misnomer, since it was never drunk but poured) of wine. This sacrifice also was carried out each day for a week.

Iron Age sacrificial altar located at the site of ancient Arad.

The sacrifices that constituted much of the worship of Israel at this time were burned on an altar that was made from acacia wood and overlaid with copper (Exod. 27). In addition to the sacrifices offered on this altar, incense was burned on a smaller altar (Exod. 30). While the sacrificial altar was placed in the courtyard, just before the door of the tabernacle, the incense altar was positioned inside the tabernacle, just before the ark of the covenant. See *Altar*.

Leviticus 1–7 gives the most detailed description of Israel’s sacrificial system, including five types of sacrifices. The sacrifices and offerings that were brought by the people were to be the physical expression of their inward devotion.

1. Burnt offering (*olah*) Offered in the morning and in the evening, as well as on special days such as the Sabbath, the new moon, and the yearly feasts (Num. 28–29; 2 Kings 16:15; 2 Chron. 2:4; 31:3; Ezra 3:3–6). Rituals performed after childbirth (Lev. 12:6–8), for an unclean discharge (Lev. 15:14–15) or hemorrhage (Lev. 15:29–30), or after a person who was keeping a Nazirite vow was defiled (Num. 6:10–11) required a burnt offering, as well as a sin offering.

The animal for this sacrifice could be a young bull, lamb, goat, turtledove, or young pigeon, but it had to be a perfect and complete specimen. The type of animal chosen for this sacrifice seems to be dependent on the financial ability of the one who brings the offering. The one bringing the offering was to lay a hand on the animal, indicating that the animal was taking the person’s place, and then he was to kill it. The priest then collected the blood and sprinkled it around the altar and the sanctuary, and the worshiper cut up and skinned the animal. If a bird was brought, the priest killed it. After the priest arranged the various parts on the altar, the entire animal was burned as a sacrifice. The only portion that remained was the hide, and the priest received it (Lev. 7:8). The one who made this sacrifice did so to restore the relationship with God and to atone for some sin. When Araunah offered to David his threshing floor, oxen, and wood without cost so that David could sacrifice, David refused. His explanation was that he could not offer burnt offerings that cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:18–25).

2. Grain offering (*minchah*; “meat offering,” KJV) Offering from the harvest of the land; the only type that required no bloodshed. It was composed of fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense. Sometimes this offering was cooked into cakes prior to taking it to the priest. These cakes, however, had to be made without leaven. Every grain offering had to have salt in it (Lev. 2:13), perhaps as a symbol of the covenant (Num.

18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5). Only a portion of this offering was burned on the altar, with the remainder going to the priests. While no reason is given for the grain offering, it may have symbolized the recognition of God's blessing in the harvest by a society based to a large degree on agriculture. The bringing of a representative portion of the grain harvest was another outward expression of devotion. Grain offerings as well as "drink offerings" or libations of wine accompanied all burnt offerings and peace offerings (Num. 15:3–4).

3. Peace offering (*zebach shelamim*; "well-being," NRSV; "shared," REB; "fellowship," NIV) Consisting of the sacrifice of a bull, cow, lamb, or goat that had no defect. As with the burnt offering, the individual laid a hand on the animal and killed it. The priests, in turn, sprinkled the blood around the altar. Only certain parts of the internal organs were burned. The priest received the breast and the right thigh (Lev. 7:28–36), but the one who offered the sacrifice was given much of the meat to have a meal of celebration (Lev. 7:11–21). As part of the meal, various kinds of bread were offered (and ultimately kept by the priest). A "peace offering" was to be brought in response to an unexpected blessing (a "thank offering") or an answer to prayer (a "vow offering"), or for general thankfulness (a "freewill offering"). The idea of thanksgiving was associated with the peace offering. It often accompanied other sacrifices in celebration of events such as the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:63) or spiritual renewal (2 Chron. 29:31–36). The "wave offerings" (*tenuphah*, "consecrated gift") and the "heave offerings" (*terumah*, "contribution") were associated with the peace offerings. They were portions presented or lifted up before the Lord, mentioned first as part of the priestly ordination ceremony (Exod. 29:24–27). Whereas the wave offering was always offered in the sanctuary, the heave offering could be presented anywhere.

4. Sin offering (*chatta't*; "purification," REB) This was designed to purify the sanctuary from sin that was committed unintentionally, and thereby allow God to continue dwelling with His people. Its nature varied according to who committed the sin. If the priest or the congregation of Israel sinned, then a bull was required. A leader of the people had to bring a male goat, while anyone else sacrificed a female goat or a lamb. The poor were allowed to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. The one bringing the offering placed a hand on the animal and then slaughtered it. When the priest or the congregation sinned, the blood was sprinkled seven times before the veil in the sanctuary, and some of it was placed on the horns of the incense altar. The rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the sacrificial altar. For others who sinned, the sprinkling of the blood before the veil was omitted. The same internal organs that were designated for burning in the peace offering were likewise designated in this sacrifice. The rest of the animal was taken outside of the camp to the place where the ashes of the sacrifices were disposed, and there it was burned. These disposal procedures were not followed when the sin offering was made on behalf of a non-priestly person (Lev. 6:24–30). In this case, the priest was allowed to eat some of the meat.

5. Guilt offering (*asham*, "trespass," KJV; "reparation," REB) This offering seems to overlap somewhat with the sin offering (Lev. 4–5). In Lev. 5:6–7 the guilt offering is called a sin offering. The guilt offering was concerned supremely with restitution. Someone who took something illegally was expected to repay it in full plus 20 percent of the value and then bring a ram for the guilt offering. Other instances in which the guilt offering was prescribed included the cleansing of a leper (Lev. 14), having sexual relations with the female slave of another person (Lev. 19:20–22), and for the renewing of a Nazirite vow that had been broken (Num. 6:11–12).

The burnt, grain, peace, sin, and guilt offerings composed the basic sacrificial system of Israel. These sacrifices were commonly used in conjunction with each other and were carried out on both an individual and a corporate basis. The sacrificial system taught the necessity of dealing with sin and, at the same time, demonstrated that God had provided a way for dealing with sin.

Prophets' Attitude toward the Sacrificial System The prophets spoke harshly about the people's concept of sacrifice. They tended to ignore faith, confession, and devotion, thinking the mere act of sacrifice ensured forgiveness. Isaiah contended that the sacrifices were worthless when they were not accompanied by repentance and an obedient life (Isa. 1:10–17). Micah reflected the same sentiments when he proclaimed that God was not interested in the physical act of sacrifice by itself but in the life and heart of the one making the sacrifice (Mic. 6:4–6). Jeremiah condemned the belief that as long as the temple was in Jerusalem and the people were faithful to perform the sacrifices, then God would protect them. The symbol of the sacrifice must be reflected in the individual's life (Jer. 7:1–26). Malachi chastised the people for

offering the lame and sick animals to God instead of the best, as the Levitical law required. In doing this, the people were defiling the altar and despising God (Mal. 1:7–14).

The prophets did not want to abolish the sacrificial system. They, instead, denounced the people's misuse of it. God wanted more than the physical performance of meaningless sacrifices. He desired the offerings to exemplify the heart of the worshiper.

New Testament During the time of the NT the people sacrificed according to the guidelines in the OT. In keeping with the Levitical law (Lev. 12), Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple and offered a sacrifice for her purification. She sacrificed turtledoves or pigeons, indicating the family's low financial status. When Jesus healed the leper (Luke 5:12–14), He told him to go to the priest and make a sacrifice (cp. Lev. 14). The cleansing of the temple (John 2) came about because people were selling animals and birds for the various sacrifices within the temple precincts. These people had allowed the "business" of sacrifice to overwhelm the spiritual nature of the offerings. Jesus chided the Pharisees for neglecting family responsibilities by claiming that something was "corban," or offered to God, and thus unavailable for the care of their parents (Mark 7). *Corban* is the most common and general Hebrew word for sacrificial offering (Lev. 1:2). See *Corban*.

The NT consistently describes Christ's death in sacrificial terms. Hebrews portrays Christ as the sinless high priest who offered Himself up as a sacrifice for sinners (7:27). The superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the Levitical sacrificial system is seen in that His sacrifice had to be offered only once. The book ends with an encouragement to offer sacrifices of praise to God through Christ. This thought is reflected in 1 Pet. 2 where believers are called a holy and royal priesthood who offer up spiritual sacrifices.

Paul used the terminology of the OT sacrifices in teaching about the death of Jesus. His death was an offering and sacrifice to God and, as such, a fragrant aroma (Eph. 5:2). He associated Jesus with the Passover sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7).

The first-century church lived in a culture that sacrificed to their gods. Paul and Barnabas at Lystra were thought to be the gods Zeus and Hermes. The priest of Zeus sought to offer sacrifices to them (Acts 14). The church at Corinth was embroiled in a controversy over whether or not it was permissible for Christians to eat meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8–10). Paul's preaching of the gospel at Ephesus disrupted the business and worship of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19).

When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Jews' sacrificial system ceased. By this time, however, the church had begun to distance itself from Judaism. The biblical view of sacrifice changed as well. In the OT and in the beginning years of the NT, sacrifice was the accepted mode of worship. With the death of Christ, however, animal sacrifice became unnecessary. As the temple and priest of God, the believer now has the responsibility for offering acceptable spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15). Paul also spoke of himself as a libation poured out (Phil. 2:17). He called the Philippians' gift a fragrant aroma and an acceptable sacrifice to God (Phil. 4:18; Rom. 15:16).

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Obadiah the Steward of Ahab

King **Ahab** ranked among the most evil of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, yet his steward Obadiah was a faithful worshiper of Yahweh. During **Jezebel's** persecution of the prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in caves and secretly brought them provisions (1 Kings 18:4).

Because of the drought that **Elijah** (through God) had called upon Israel, Ahab's prize herds were in danger of starvation. He went with Obadiah to find water and grass to sustain them, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. God had commanded the prophet Elijah to confront Ahab, and he sought out Obadiah to arrange the meeting. Obadiah was afraid for his life, but Elijah assured him of God's protection. The steward then went to Ahab to tell him that he had seen Elijah, and Ahab went out to meet the prophet. It was at this meeting that the contest between Elijah and the priests of **Baal** was arranged.

Late pre-Christian tradition says that this Obadiah was the author of the prophetic book of that name. This is not reasonable, however, even though the hatred of the Edomites was as strong in Ahab's time as it

¹¹ Clendenen, E. R. with Langston Scott. (2003). [Sacrifice and Offering](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1428–1432). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

was later. Obadiah was a common name, and Ahab lived almost three centuries earlier than the events referred to in the book of Obadiah.¹²

¹² Losch, R. R. (2008). In [*All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture*](#) (pp. 325–326). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.