

## 1 KINGS 18:30-40

### REPAIRING THE ALTAR OF THE LORD

“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. 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,’ 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 of seed. 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.’ 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. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

“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. 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.’ 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. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.’ 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.”<sup>1</sup>

**Y**ears before, unknown people had built an altar here. On this high promontory, they had worshipped, offering up sacrifices to the True and Living God. With the offerings, they had sought fellowship with God, content in the knowledge that they were accepted before Him; perhaps they had sought cleansing from sin that plagued their lives. Whatever their reason, in this place unknown people had built the altar and worshipped the LORD God. That altar had stood as a visible sign of the reality of the True and Living God; and it had testified that people once worshipped Him as the Most High God.

Something dreadful had occurred in the land, however. Swifter than anyone could have imagined possible, the civil government was corrupted. The people positively accepted new progressive attitudes that demonstrated to the world that with the advanced thought now regnant the nation was just like the nations about them. Of course, with the implementation of liberal thought was the inevitable growth of spiritual declension. Only a dwindling number of spokesmen for the LORD God stood opposed to the flood of wickedness. Watching the capitulation of the supposed righteous, with growing horror these few men spoke out against the advance of evil. Their voices were unavailing in halting the spreading cancer promoting worship of deities born out of man’s own fertile imaginations and the concomitant corruption of the True Faith. As increasing numbers of prophets compromised with wickedness, embracing the worship of the Baalim and the Asherim, altars that once dotted the land were torn down, replaced by Asherah Poles. The sacred places where the Living God had been worshipped were transformed into houses of prostitution. This altar, also, was torn down and the stones scattered.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

At last, one man imbued with a burning desire to glorify the True and Living God flashed onto the scene. Said to have come from Tishbe in Gilead, Elijah the Tishbite appeared suddenly, brilliantly flashing onto the scene much as a meteor streaks across the night sky. This rough-hewn man would bring a nation to its knees. Kings would be reduced to searching for water, the people would be shamed for their perfidy and even worshippers of the LORD God would tremble before him. He was the last opportunity for the nation to turn again to the Living God.

The rhythm of his life and service before the Lord is related with increasing tempo and growing intensity until at last the prophets of Baal, the king and many of the people of the land are gathered on that high promontory where the altar had once stood. The strange man proposed a contest unlike anything any of those gathered had ever witnessed. “Elijah approached all the people and said, ‘How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him.’ But the people didn’t answer him a word.

“Then Elijah said to the people, ‘I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The God who answers with fire, He is God.’

“All the people answered, ‘That sounds good.’

“Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don’t light the fire.’

“So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘Baal, answer us!’ But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

“At noon Elijah mocked them. He said, ‘Shout loudly, for he’s a god! Maybe he’s thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he’s on the road. Perhaps he’s sleeping and will wake up!’ They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. All afternoon they kept on raving until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention” [1 KINGS 18:21-29].<sup>2</sup>

A full day of ritual, frenetically speaking in tongues and self-abuse, left the 450 prophets of Baal exhausted. Unable to continue their religious ceremonial rants, they complied with Elijah’s gruff demand that they cease. It may not be part of the text, but ancient tradition, codified both in the Septuagint<sup>3</sup> and in the Syriac Peshitta<sup>4</sup> appends this statement, “When it was time to offer the sacrifice, Elijah the Tishbite spoke to the prophets of the abominations: ‘Stand aside for the time being, and I will offer my burnt offering.’ So they stood aside ...”<sup>5</sup>

It is at this point that the man of God reveals the One Whom he served. As for the people, it could be said that they had heard a rumour of God, but they had not known God. In this respect, the contest on Mount Carmel is a parable of our own age of spiritual declension. As our world grows ever more religious and as we affirm our spirituality (whatever that may mean), fewer and fewer of our fellow citizens appear to know the True and Living God. People have heard a rumour of God; but few give evidence of knowing Him.

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<sup>2</sup> **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible

<sup>4</sup> Syriac translation of the Hebrew Bible

<sup>5</sup> See footnote in **NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

Professing Christians of this day appear eager to join every noisy march; but they are not quite certain why they are marching. We insist on innocuous prayers at every civic event—prayers that ask nothing of God though they make us feel spiritual; nevertheless, few of the professed people of God are prepared to engage in prevailing prayer. We who name the Name of Christ are willing to go to a service designed to make us feel good about ourselves, and if that service entertains us, all the better; but the preacher had better not make us feel uncomfortable. We eagerly participate in the rituals of the Faith; but we can't honestly say that we have met the Risen Saviour in the acts. In short, we have forgotten who we are and from whence we come. When we need a rude prophet, we are unlikely to receive him should he appear. We will do well to review the contest on Carmel, applying what we learn to our own lives.

**THE ANCIENT PATHS** — “Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’ And all the people came near to him.” When the prophets of Baal had exhausted their ritualistic repertoire, Elijah called the people to come near. For the most, it is unlikely that they had ever heard a prophet of God; or if they had heard a prophet, it was years prior and they dismissed what he said at that time. To address the need of the land, it would be necessary to hear again what the man of God might say; the people needed to hear the voice of God echoed through the man of God. What we witness is nothing short of a call to return to the ancient paths that were long forgotten.

God, through Jeremiah, issued precisely such a call on another occasion.

“The LORD said to his people:

‘You are standing at the crossroads. So consider your path.

Ask where the old, reliable paths are.

Ask where the path is that leads to blessing and follow it.

If you do, you will find rest for your souls.”

But they said, ‘We will not follow it!’

[**JEREMIAH 6:16**]<sup>6</sup>

How very contemporary the attitude of the people of God in Jeremiah's day! How very like us! We know what is right—it is trumpeted from multiple pulpits; yet, we have no stomach to do what is right. It is too difficult to be godly. It is too demanding to serve God as He commands. It is inconvenient to live righteously. So, we stubbornly insist that we won't live that way.

Ancient paths for the people of Israel meant that the people must humble themselves before God, must obey His commands, must seek His face, must honour Him in all things. The people performed all the rites and rituals perfectly—they had the outward expressions of religion nailed; however, transformation of the heart was lacking. It would not be out of line to say they loved the ritual aspects of religion, though they were less enthusiastic about the inner transformation that knowledge of the Holy One would assuredly bring. In similar fashion, if we Christians will again walk the ancient paths of our forefathers, we will need to know what the neglected paths might be.

As was true for Israel in the days of Elijah, the same truths hold for us. We must insist on inward transformation of the heart, not contenting ourselves with mere outward conformity to manmade rules. We must again see love for God revealed through love for His people. We must see a desire to know God and to discover what pleases Him. We must desire Him above all else. We must honour Him.

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<sup>6</sup> **Net Bible First Edition**

What were the old, reliable paths? What is missing from contemporary religion? What has brought us to a day when we stand at the crossroads? The old paths revolved around preachers who declared the Word of God prophetically; they preached with authority and with conviction. They held some truths tenaciously, refusing to compromise and unwilling to deviate from what they knew to be true.

***THE BIBLE WAS RECEIVED AS AUTHORITATIVE AND ACCURATE.*** The Bible is the Word of God. In an earlier day, it was accepted that all evangelicals, and most professing Christians, accepted the Bible to be the Word of God. This Word was accepted as inerrant and infallible. We learn from Peter that this written Word is more trustworthy than personal experience when he writes, “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” [2 PETER 1:16-21]. Though my experiences may betray me, the Word of the Living God will never lead me astray.

In an earlier missive, Peter anticipated what he wrote in this portion of the Word when he declared that the things that were written were motivated and superintended by the Spirit of God. “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look” [1 PETER 1:10-12].

***SALVATION WAS RECOGNISED AS GOD’S FREE GIFT.*** Until relatively recent days, the hallmark of the Faith was that salvation was the gift of God—it was neither merited nor earned. In an earlier day, ministers of the Word would have been united in affirming that all people must be saved. Moreover, those ministers, representing a broad spectrum of Christendom would have attested their confidence that the saved would be assured of eternity in the presence of the Living God. Those who occupied the sacred desk in that earlier day were unabashed in declaring, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

They would have asserted without reservation, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:16-21].

***WHEN SALVATION WAS RECEIVED, IT WAS ANTICIPATED THAT THE LIFE WOULD BE TRANSFORMED.*** The redeemed reveal the salvation they have received through a righteous life. Isaiah articulated this truth when speaking of those who purported to be spiritual even while speaking heresy. “To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” [ISAIAH 8:20].

The Prophet’s word anticipates that which the Apostle of Love would write over 750 years later. “Those who live sinful lives are disobeying God. Sin is disobedience. You know that Christ appeared in order to take away our sins. He isn’t sinful. Those who live in Christ don’t go on sinning. Those who go on sinning haven’t seen or known Christ.

“Dear children, don’t let anyone deceive you. Whoever does what God approves of has God’s approval as Christ has God’s approval. The person who lives a sinful life belongs to the devil, because the devil has been committing sin since the beginning. The reason that the Son of God appeared was to destroy what the devil does” [1 JOHN 3:4-8].<sup>7</sup>

A redeemed person reveals that redemption through a righteous life. John also writes, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him” [1 JOHN 5:18].

***REDEEMED PEOPLE SOUGHT OUT A CHURCH AND FAITHFULLY PARTICIPATED IN THE SERVICES OF THEIR CHURCH.*** In that earlier day, when biblical faith held sway, it would have been unthinkable that a saved person would not unite with a congregation. This was the standard of the New Testament; and since the Bible was accepted as the Word of God, it meant that those who professed Christ would not dream of simply attending services. They took very seriously the statement concerning believers who came to faith during the apostolic era. Doctor Luke has written, “Those who gladly received [Peter’s] word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” [ACTS 2:41]. The entity to which these were added becomes evident shortly, when Doctor Luke writes, “Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” [ACTS 2:46, 47].<sup>8</sup>

***CONGREGATIONS HELD ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE FOR LIVING AS REDEEMED PEOPLE.*** The Reformers held that no congregation could be considered a true church if discipline was absent. Today, it is greatly to be feared that accountability is part of a distant past. The Master taught His disciples to hold one another accountable for their conduct. “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” [MATTHEW 18:15-20].

Concerning a man engaged in pernicious and persistent sin, Paul warned the Corinthians, “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 5:4, 5].

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<sup>7</sup> **God’s Word Translation** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

<sup>8</sup> **New King James Version** (Thomas Nelson, 1982)

**FATHERS ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR THEIR FAMILIES.** When I came to faith, the family altar was virtually ubiquitous among the households of the faithful. Fathers would gather their children to read from the Word of God and to pray with them. Perhaps this occurred at the breakfast table, before the family left for the various destinations that marked their lives, or perhaps it would be in the evening before the children retired to bed. Fathers were seen as responsible to teach their children of the Lord. Fathers accepted this responsibility on the basis of the apostolic admonition, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” [EPHESIANS 6:4].

This responsibility for the children and for the family found its roots in the Old Covenant. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” [DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7].

This paternal responsibility was iterated throughout the writings of Moses. “You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” [DEUTERONOMY 11:18, 19].

It carried down to the days of the Psalmist. Asaph wrote a Maskil that opened with these words that speak of the responsibility to instruct the generation that follows.

“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
    incline your ears to the words of my mouth!  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
    I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
    that our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children,  
    but tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
    and the wonders that he has done.”

[PSALM 78:1-4]

I’m not contending that prior generations were perfect—they were sinners, just as we are sinners. I am, however, stating that we are living off the interest of past deposits of righteousness invested in society. The general acceptance of godly attitudes permeated the churches, and thus spread throughout society, with the result that the populace reflected respect for the truths of God even if they were not godly. Such cannot be said of society today.

In this day, we have jettisoned responsibilities for rights and spurned reason for rashness. Today, we confuse brashness for boldness. We no longer value, much less recognise, courage when it does appear, rather misconstruing it as contentiousness. We have exchanged firmness for flexibility, resolve for retreat; thus, esteeming self-sacrifice we embrace self-indulgence. Consequently, the attitudes that characterise contemporary society stain the churches, ensuring that the altars of the Lord are cast down and left in ruins.

**REPAIRING THE ALTAR OF THE LORD** — “Elijah ... repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. 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,’ and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD.”

If we accept that God has left us here for His purposes, and if we accept that we are responsible to live holy lives before Him to the praise of His glory until He returns, and if we accept that we adorn the doctrine of God by our manner of life, then we must accept that we are appointed to ensure that the altar of the Lord is erected in our day. As Elijah would need to build again the altar of the Lord, so Christians in this day are responsible to erect the altar of the Lord. I am not suggesting that we must build physical structures to the glory of God; I am saying that we must again do those things that reveal His presence among us. If there will ever be revival in our day, then we must prepare ourselves so that we can be used by God’s Good Spirit.

Those aspects that once marked the people of God as the Holy Bride of Christ will need to be cultivated in this day. We must again accept the Bible as authoritative and accurate. Christians will be required to affirm that salvation is God’s gift offered freely without merit on the part of any mere mortal. We will find that we must insist that salvation is revealed through a godly life—it is possession and not profession that must be sought. It will be necessary that the churches must insist that the saved must seek out a congregation where they can faithfully participate in the services. Discipline among the churches will again be required if we will honour the Living God. And among families, there will again be need to insist that fathers must accept responsibility to serve as religious leaders for their own families. These are minimum requirements if the altar of God will be rebuilt.

Why is it that more churches do not rebuild this altar in our day? Undoubtedly, multiple answers could be advanced. Let’s be honest and acknowledge that these are reasons and not excuses for failure. Whenever we came to the time for a test during my years at the medical school, some wag, channeling Rudyard Kipling, would write on the chalkboard at the front of the lecture hall, “We have a thousand reasons for failure, and not one excuse.” Assuredly, the observation was accurate. It would have been appropriate to cite Alexander Pope at that point, “An excuse is worse and more terrible than a lie; for an excuse is a lie guarded.” Let’s consider some of the more common excuses that are employed by the people of God.

Some will contend that we reveal our *failure to keep abreast of the times* if we attempt to live according to the Word. That is tantamount to saying that God is mutable, vacillating, fickle. However, we know that God has declared repeatedly, “I the Lord do not change” [**MALACHI 3:6**]. Balaam, compelled by the Spirit of God, testified of the True and Living God:

“God is not man, that he should lie,  
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.  
Has he said, and will he not do it?  
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”

[**NUMBERS 23:19**]

The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians testified of Christ Jesus our Lord: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” [**HEBREWS 13:8**]. Thus, if we believe that Jesus is unchanging, and if we believe that His Word does not change, then of necessity we must accept that we are responsible to live according to what is revealed through that Word. Christ charged us to obey His commands! “You are my friends if you do what I command you” [**JOHN 15:14**].

Others may argue that living according to the Word will result in *exposure to hostility* from the world. Make no mistake! The world does not love exposure of its rebellion to the will of God. Nowhere is that hostility more on view than among religious rogues. Individuals endeavouring to live a lie while appearing religious resent exposure. Consequently, persecution, perpetuated by religious people when the Faith strips away the veneer they have carefully crafted to cover their lives will be vicious and vigorous.

Perhaps we need to hear again the words of the Master. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause’” [JOHN 15:18-25].

Soon after He spoke these words, Jesus warned, “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you” [JOHN 16:1-4].

From earliest days as a follower of the Master, I have pondered the response of the LORD God to His prophet when Jeremiah complained how hard it was to continue as God’s spokesman.

“If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you,  
how will you compete with horses?  
And if in a safe land you are so trusting,  
what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?”

[JEREMIAH 12:5]

It is as though God comforted His prophet by saying, “Jeremiah, if you think it is tough now, just wait.” I have considered that the words were spoken to me, urging me to inure myself to hardship. I have believed it my responsibility of a messenger of the Risen Saviour to urge all who follow to prepare for the day of trial which is surely coming.

Listen again to Paul’s encouragement to Timothy. “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1-7]. Paul began his service among the faithful, warning of trials for those who would follow the Saviour. At the conclusion of the first missionary tour, “they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” [ACTS 14:21, 22].



**FIRE FROM HEAVEN** — “Elijah ... made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. 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.’ 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. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

“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. 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.’ 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. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.’ 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.”

What is needed among our churches is fire from heaven—a holy revival of the Faith. Revival will not come through organisation—we have about organised the Holy Spirit out of the churches in this day. Revival will not come through extended prayer, though prayer is assuredly a component of revival. Elijah’s petition was uncomplicated, consisting of a few, pointed words. “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. 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” [1 KINGS 18:36, 37].

The prayer that Elijah offered up before the watching Israelites was directed to the Living God. The Prophet sought one great thing from the LORD God—that He might be known as God! Elijah’s longing was for God to be glorified before His people. Just so, if we will ever witness the power of God in this day and in our midst, we must seek His glory above all else, even as Jesus has taught us, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” [MATTHEW 6:33].

Concerning Elijah’s praying, James has this comment, “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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit” [JAMES 5:17, 18]. Elijah was simply a man committed to God and to seeking His glory. Therefore, Elijah’s actions should be seen as exemplary rather than exceptional. The encouragement provided through the Word is that the powerful demonstration of divine power witnessed on Carmel was exceptional only in the sense that so few among us are prepared to act with sufficient courage to witness God working in power. We have become so used to the mundane that we believe that God is unable to work in like manner in our day! We have lived subnormal lives so long that when we actually see the normal Christian life we believe it is supernatural.

So much of modern prayer life seeks personal comfort, requests ease of life, asks that we may not experience difficulties in the routine of life; our focus is us rather than the Lord God. We Christians would do well to reflect on what we are seeking when we petition the Lord our God and transform our prayers so that they seek God’s glory. Perhaps this is one great reason we see so little power among the churches and why we witness so little transformation of the lives of those who share our services.

How different is our own prayer from that of the Apostles! When they were threatened, the Apostles prayed, “Master of all . . . pay attention to their threats, and grant to Your servants to speak Your message with great courage, while You extend Your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus” [ACTS 4:24, 29, 30].<sup>9</sup>

On Carmel, the people were obviously impressed by the demonstration of God’s power; however, their awe did not necessarily translate into worship. Elijah might well have rebuked the Israelites gathered on Carmel as had Joshua on another occasion. Joshua affirmed his determination to lead his family in serving the Lord [see JOSHUA 24:15]. The people immediately clamoured that they, also, would follow the Lord. However, listen to Joshua’s terse response. “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good” [JOSHUA 24:19, 20].

How unlike modern preachers! We are so eager for any result to our preaching that we willingly tone down the demands of the Master and endeavour to make the way smooth so that no one will be turned away by the challenge of the Christian life. I must say quite plainly and for the benefit of all who listen, this Christian life is not an easy life—not if it is real! The call of the Master is to follow, knowing that the world will not be enthusiastic about your choice! Praying to the Father, Jesus testified, “I have given [My disciples] your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” [JOHN 17:14-17].

Now, let me ask: do you long for God’s glory? Do you long for Him to be honoured among us? Do you yearn for Him to receive praise, though it may mean you must be humbled? Until we come to that position, we durst not imagine that we shall again see the power of God displayed in our midst. Perhaps it is that many of the people called by the Name of the Son of God need to be converted. It seems probable that many of His professed people have settled for a profession without transformation. If the lives of those who call themselves by His Name are any indication, that may just be the situation.

I trust that is not true of any of us. Still, until one is born from above, she cannot say that she is redeemed. Have you faith in the Son of God? Do you know of a certainty that you are twice-born? This is the message of life: Christ Jesus came into the world to give His life as a sacrifice for sinful people. He presented His life in your place. That is noble, but the power of the Good News is that He conquered death, breaking the bonds of death and rising from the dead. For this reason the Word of God invites all who will accept it, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one confesses and is set free.” The Apostle, having presented this wonderful truth, then cites the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].<sup>10</sup>

I pray that you have this freedom that is found in Christ Jesus as Master over life. If not, let this be the day you enter into this new life. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> NET Bible

<sup>10</sup> Author’s Free Translation