



The last couple of weeks we have seen the tension continue to build in Israel between the proper worship of God and Baal worship. In 1 Kings 17 Elijah confronts Ahab with his idolatry and announces a drought as God's punishment. After some time in hiding with the ravens and a widow in Sidon, God brings Elijah back to Israel and announces his return through Obadiah (1 Kings 18:1-16). In 1 Kings 18:16-46 we see the culmination of God's plan for the drought, the declaration of the Lord as the only true God and a resounding call for his people to return to him.

The drought has certainly been a trial of adversity for everyone involved. Elijah has hidden in the wilderness and a foreign country, getting by on minimal food. The scene of Ahab and Obadiah searching for water and grazing land indicates the cost the drought brought to the kingdom. And the people are certainly feeling the costs. Meanwhile there has likely been an ongoing debate about who can end the drought, God or Baal. During prosperous times Ahab and the people had little interest in heeding Elijah's warnings, but the drought has changed their perspective and prepared them to listen.

Gathering on Mt. Carmel, Elijah shares the point of the challenge up front: "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." Building on the fact that what he has said about the drought has come true, Elijah proposes an indisputable test of truth that the people can only accept. The real God will bring fire on his own sacrifice. The prophets of Baal go first, clearly demonstrating that their truth claims are empty. Then Elijah begins his turn by adding water to the sacrifice, making the results incontrovertible. He also reminds the people of their heritage as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Building the altar with twelve stones reinforces this and even brings to mind other monuments to God's greatness and his deliverance of Israel.

With the scene prepared, Elijah pointedly prays that God might demonstrate his existence and his work of "turning the people's hearts back again." God does so unhesitatingly and in the process brings them to a point of decision. The prophets of Baal have already decided, having fully embraced their falsehood. Ahab could return to the Lord's commands, though we see later that he does not. But the people are Elijah's focus. The drought has given them perspective, so when Elijah challenges their "wavering" (1 Kings 18:21) and demonstrates God's existence, God builds their faith. Not only do they see the truth, but they act on it, executing the idolatrous prophets of Baal (despite Ahab) and relying on God for provision.

### Discussion Questions

Why does James say that we should consider it joy to experience trials, and what does it take to develop this perspective?

How do good times and bad times shape our faith differently? What about experiencing bad times enables us to persevere and finish the race?

What trials are you currently experiencing? How is God using them to perfect your faith?