

## **The Water-Soaked Offering**

### **Solving a Bible Puzzle**

(I Kings 17:1; 18:18-40)

Other times you and I have solved some Bible puzzles, haven't we? That was fun, wasn't it? Well, how would you like to solve another Bible puzzle with me today? All right.

This puzzle is found in the Old Testament in the book of I Kings. We'll begin by my telling you the story that contains the puzzle. It's an exciting story! After you have heard the story, then we'll look at the puzzle.

A very long time ago there was a great prophet of the Lord whose name was Elijah. I've told you about Elijah before, but this time we're going to try to solve a puzzle that is in one of the true stories about him.

At the time of Elijah the land of the Jews was divided into 2 big parts. There was the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel. And each of these 2 kingdoms had its own king.

Elijah lived in the kingdom of Israel, and the name of the king of Israel was Ahab. Now, King Ahab was very wicked, and his wife Jezebel was very wicked. Why, instead of worshipping the Lord God, Ahab and Jezebel worshipped an idol they called Baal! They said that Baal was the god that made things grow and that Baal controlled the rain. Also, many wicked things were done as part of this worship of Baal.

And Ahab made a big idol of Baal, a statue, and built an altar to be used to offer sacrifices to that statue. Why, that was not only very wicked, it was very silly, too, wasn't it? After all, an idol is just something made by people and can't do anything, can it?! Only the Lord God is God, and only God should be worshipped!

And Ahab's wife Jezebel had many of the Lord's priests killed! And many other men were made to be priests for this statue of Baal and to offer sacrifices to it. Imagine that?! And these priests were also called prophets of Baal. But back to Elijah.

Well, of course, Elijah hated all that worshipping of idols, and he was a prophet of the Lord God. So one day Elijah told King Ahab, "I stand before the Lord. And there won't be any rain unless I say so." God was letting Elijah say this. Now, remember, the bad people who worshipped Baal said that Baal was the one that controlled the rain. But the Lord God really controls the rain, doesn't He?

Well, Ahab got mad at Elijah, and he tried to find him. But the Lord was taking care of Elijah and protecting him, wasn't He? So though Ahab had people looking everywhere for Elijah, they couldn't find him.

Well, the Lord knew that Ahab would really be mad at Elijah, so the Lord told Elijah to hide by a brook of water, and the Lord had ravens fly in and bring food to Elijah two times every day.

So time went by and there was no rain, and more time went by and still there was no rain. (That would show the Baal worshippers that Baal didn't make it rain, wouldn't it?!) But what would happen if there were no rain? Yes, pretty soon the rivers would all dry up. And plants and food wouldn't grow.

Well, 3½ years went by with no rain. One day King Ahab was out looking for grass to feed his horses; he was afraid the horses would die if they didn't get some food. And at that same time the Lord told Elijah to go let Ahab see him, so he did. Ahab saw Elijah and said to him, "Are you the one causing all of this trouble for Israel?"

Elijah answered and said, "I'm not causing trouble for Israel; you are -- because you've left the Lord God and are worshipping an idol!"

Then Elijah told Ahab, "Call all of the people together along with your 450 men who serve as priests to your idol. And have them meet me at Mt. Carmel."

So Ahab did this. And the people and the false prophets of Baal, and King Ahab all gathered together at Mt. Carmel. And Elijah was there, too. Then Elijah spoke to all of the people saying, "How long are you going to be going back and forth in your thoughts? If the Lord is God, follow the Lord. But if Baal is, follow Baal."

Well, the people didn't have anything to say to Elijah after he had said this! Then Elijah told them that there would be a test to see who was really God, whether the Lord was God or Baal was. They would do this test by having the priests of Baal and himself (Elijah) each build an altar and then each would put wood and a sacrifice on their altar. But they weren't to light the fire to burn the sacrifice.

Elijah said that the priests of Baal were to have the first turn. They were to get everything ready, and after doing that, they were to call on the name of Baal and ask Baal to send fire to burn their sacrifice. After that Elijah would have his turn. Elijah would offer his sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord and ask the Lord to send fire to burn the sacrifice. Then they'd see if one of them, Baal or the Lord, would send fire. And if one did send fire, that would prove that that one was the real God.

Now that sounds like a fair test, doesn't it? And the people all thought that was a good idea. So that's what they did. First the prophets of Baal built an altar. They put wood on it, and then they put a sacrifice on top of the wood. After it was ready, they began calling on Baal and saying, "O Baal, hear us!" Nothing happened. So they went on calling on Baal. "O Baal, hear us!" They did this for about 3 hours, from morning until noon! And they began jumping up and down on the altar they had made crying out, "O Baal, hear us!" But still nothing happened!

Then Elijah started sort of making fun on them. He said, "Shout louder! Maybe Baal is thinking or busy or taking a trip, or maybe he's asleep and you need to wake him up!"

And those priests began shouting and doing all sorts of things for about 3 more hours! "O Baal, hear us!!" But still nothing happened! Baal didn't give any fire to burn up the sacrifice! (Of course, Baal couldn't do anything, could he? After all, he was just a statue that they had made!) And the people stood there for about half a day watching these priests jumping up and down and shouting -- with no fire coming to burn the sacrifice!

Finally in the middle of the afternoon Elijah decided it was time for his turn. So he said to the people, "Come near me." And the people went up near to Elijah. Now there was an altar of the Lord there, and it was broken, so Elijah fixed it. How did he do this? He took 12 big stones, one stone for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and he used these stones to make the altar to the Lord. Then he dug a big trench, a ditch, around the altar. Next Elijah put wood on the altar, and then he put the sacrifice on top of the wood.

But why did he dig a trench around the altar? Let's go on and find out! Well, when all that had been done, Elijah said, "Fill 4 big barrels with water and pour the water over the sacrifice and the wood."

So they did. And when the 4 big barrels of water had been poured over them, Elijah said, "Do it again, a second time."

So they filled the 4 big barrels with water again and poured the water over the sacrifice and the wood.

Then Elijah said, "Do it again, a third time!"

So they filled the 4 big barrels with water the third time and poured the water all over the sacrifice and the wood! Why, they had poured 12 big barrels of water over it, so much water that the water ran down into the trench and filled the trench! Wow! And that's why he had dug the trench! Well, that sacrifice and all that wood would really be soaked with water, wouldn't they?!

Then Elijah went near the altar. Do you think he was going to jump up and down and shout as the prophets of Baal had done? No! Elijah was a prophet of the one true Lord God, the only God. Elijah simply prayed a short prayer, talking to God for a minute. Elijah said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, please let it be known this day that you are the God in Israel and that I am your servant and that I have done all these things because you told me to. Hear me, O Lord. Hear me so that these people may know that You are the Lord God and that you have turned their hearts back again."

And what do you think happened then? Do you think the Lord would answer Elijah? Do you think anything could possibly burn that soaking wet offering? Yes!! The Lord can do anything, can't He?! So let's go on and see what He did, okay?

Why, after Elijah's short prayer, the Lord sent fire that burned up that soggy offering and burned up that wet wood and burned up the 12 stones and even burned up the dirt under the stones and dried up all the water in the trench!! Wow!!

And when the people saw this, they fell on their faces before the Lord and cried out, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" And that same day, just a little while after that, the Lord sent a lot of rain, the first rain in 3½ years!

So that's the story. But where is the puzzle? Well, let me tell you what the puzzle is in this story. Remember, there had been no rain for 3½ years. The streams and brooks were all dried up. Even the king was having a terrible time finding food for his animals to eat, wasn't he? -- So where did they get 12 big barrels of water to pour over the altar that Elijah had built?!

That is a puzzle, isn't it?! I hadn't thought of that until my grown son talked about it one day. Then I thought, "Yes, that is a puzzle! Where would all of that water come from?!"

Well, my son had been reading a book on Bible puzzles and had been thinking about this before he mentioned it to me. And he said, "Where did this big sacrifice take place?"

Do you remember where the people and the prophets of Baal met Elijah to do this? Yes, it was at Mt. Carmel. But do you know where Mt. Carmel is? Well, if you look at a map, you'll see that Mt. Carmel is right next to the Mediterranean Sea. So, though the Bible doesn't tell us this, where do you think they got the 12 big barrels of water to pour over the sacrifice to the Lord? Well, since Mt. Carmel is right by the ocean, it seems to me that they got all of that water out of the ocean!!

Of course, you may be thinking that they could have used the ocean water to drink and to water their plants. But don't forget, ocean water would be salty; they couldn't drink it! And salty water would kill their plants! But salty water would be just fine to pour over Elijah's sacrifice to get it all wet, wouldn't it?! Puzzle solved! Wasn't that fun?!

Yes, there are lots of puzzles like that in the Bible. Some of them are important, and some of them aren't important. But puzzles are fun to think about, aren't they? And with a little thinking (or maybe a lot of thinking!), we can solve many of them. But if you find one that you can't solve, don't worry about it. Maybe when you learn more, you can solve it later. But there are many things in the Bible that are very easy, very clear, that aren't puzzles, that we can think about instead.

But there is another sort-of puzzle in the Bible that has the answer in many places in the Bible. And that is the most important puzzle in the whole world. What do you think that puzzle is? Yes, it's the puzzle of how sinners can be able to go to heaven. After all, we know that we are all sinners, don't we? And we know that sinners can't go to heaven. So can we ever go to heaven and be with God forever?

That might be a puzzle, mightn't it? And what is the answer to that? Well, the Bible is very clear about this answer. The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loves us so much that He left His throne in heaven to come to earth as a man. He was then both God and man, wasn't He? Then Jesus died on the cross for our sins and He was buried. But 3 days later He rose from the dead and is still alive in heaven, isn't he? And if we believe this and trust in Jesus to forgive our sins, He will. Then someday we can go to heaven and be with Him. Isn't that wonderful? So that wasn't really a puzzle after all, was it?!

But we did look at a real puzzle today, didn't we? What was it? Yes, it was the puzzle of where Elijah got all of that water to pour over the sacrifice when the rivers and brooks were all dried up. That was fun, wasn't it?