

1 Kings 18:16-40

January 22, 2023



SCRIPTURE

¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

¹⁸ “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. ¹⁹ Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

But the people said nothing.

²² Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God.”

Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” ²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears,



as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” ³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs^[a] of seed. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

³⁴ “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

COMMENTARY

16-19. When the two men meet, Ahab calls Elijah the “destroyer of Israel,” blaming the drought on him, but he does not attempt immediately to have him killed. Elijah returns the accusation, stating fearlessly that Ahab’s family’s commitment to Baal has forced Yahweh to withhold rain, thus proving the Lord’s power over the storm god. Now Elijah suggests a contest to determine who benefits Israel and who troubles the land. The site will be Mount Carmel, a place that may have long held significance for both worshipers of Yahweh and adherents of Baalism. What better place to decide who is God, what prophets tell the truth, and what leaders benefit or harm the people?



20-21. Ahab apparently is satisfied with the odds and expects this to be an excellent way to rid himself of this troublesome prophet and separatistic Yahwism at the same time. So Ahab obliges Elijah by sending for the people and the prophets. They wait to see who will win and who can help them the most. Will it be Baal or Yahweh? The prophet challenges the people to stop limping between two opinions—to decide who is God and then act on that decision. The people are noncommittal at best. They “limp” along without conviction, wanting to follow halfheartedly one god and then the other.

22-25. Only Elijah and, ironically, the prophets of Baal have any conviction. Both Elijah and his counterparts believe their god to be the solution to Israel’s problems. Elijah is supremely confident that there is no god but Yahweh. His experiences in Phoenicia have confirmed to him this truth. Despite what some scholars argue, Elijah does not accept the existence of many gods, thinking only that Yahweh is the strongest. Elijah wants to eliminate Baal from consideration whenever Israel decides theological matters. To achieve this goal Elijah suggests a contest. He says that a sacrifice should be offered and that the real God must come take it by fire. The people like this contest, and the text does not indicate the Baalists object at all. Again, at least the prophets of Baal do not lack conviction. As storm god, Baal was thought to be responsible for lightning as well as rain, it ought to have been an easy contest.

26-29. Baal’s prophets attempt to rouse him from the dead. They shout, but no one responds. Next, they “dance” or “limp” around the altar, again trying to get the god’s attention. This ritual dance also gets no response. At noon Elijah begins to taunt them, suggesting Baal is preoccupied in some manner. Desperate now, their authority at stake, the Baalists cut themselves and practice frenzied prophesying, not unlike self-hypnosis. Though they try for hours, the text says as explicitly as it can that their god is unable to answer because he is not real.

30-40. Very dramatically, Elijah rebuilds the altar now damaged by the frantic Baalistic rites. He then soaks it with water to remove any doubt about the miracle that will soon occur. When he prays for the fire to fall, he asks the Lord to remind the people that he is the covenant God of Israel. Without Yahweh there would be no Israel. Elijah also prays that he will be vindicated as the prophet of the covenant God. Finally, he asks that the people know Yahweh is God and that they have the opportunity to repent at once. This prayer incorporates concern, then, for God’s reputation, the validity of the prophet’s work, and for the people’s well-being. Fire falls without delay. It consumes the altar and the sacrifice. In the immediacy of the moment, with fear in their hearts, the people confess, “Yahweh, He is God!” They see no validity in any of Baal’s claims at this point and have become, temporarily at least, strict Yahwistic monotheists. Thus, Elijah has taken the first step in showing the people who is God. The evil prophets were executed.

MAIN POINT

The power in prayer comes from faith in a powerful God.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are the distinguishing characteristics of people of great faith from the Bible, such as Elijah?

Do you think God still works today like He did in Elijah's life? Why or why not?

It may be hard for us to believe God still acts today as He did in Elijah's life. When we look at examples of people of faith from the Bible, like Elijah, we may be amazed by those who held such great faith. Yet, it is important for us to remember that in stories like this one, it's not Elijah's greatness that we witness but the glory of God. As we seek power in prayer, we must remember that power comes from faith in a powerful God.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:16-21.

What was Elijah's charge against the people? Why did the people need to decide whether the Lord or Baal was God?

Why didn't the people say anything in response to Elijah (see v. 21)? What attitudes could account for their silence?

Elijah accused the Israelites of indecisiveness. Some Israelites may have worshiped God as Israel's traditional God and may have worshiped Baal also, believing he would send the rains on time so the harvest would be good. Elijah told the Israelites they had to choose. God does not tolerate half-hearted or divided loyalty and service. When faced with the choice, the people said nothing. Some may have been content in their commitment to both God and Baal. The presence of Ahab and the prophets of Baal might have frightened others into silence. When challenged to choose, the people refused.

Hesitating between two opinions is often a convenient way of delaying our submission to God. In what ways might our hesitation to give God our worship alert us to hidden idolatries in our life?

Read Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13. Have you ever tried to serve two masters? What is that like?



Every person faces a challenge like the one Elijah presented on that day. Will we choose God to be Lord of our lives, or will we be content to rely on our own abilities and resources?

When we accept Christ as Savior, we still face daily choices of whether to seek and follow the Lord's guidance and to rely on His strength.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:22-29.

What do you learn about Elijah from these verses?

What message did God send to the people that day on Mount Carmel?

Before the Lord sent rain on the parched land, He wanted to demonstrate that He, not Baal, controlled the weather and sustained His people. Had the rain come without such a contest, Ahab, Jezebel, and many others might have claimed Baal finally had responded to their prayers and ended the drought the Lord had sent. For them, Baal would have proved to be the ultimate power. Israel needed to understand Baal was not God and had no power.

What are some examples of situations that may require you to stand for the Lord against opposition?

What prepares you to take a courageous stand?

What promises are given to the believer?

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:30-40.

What stands out to you about Elijah's prayer?

Elijah first asked God to act so people would know the true God of Israel is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Elijah wanted Israel to know the Almighty God who had guided Israel's founders still cared for His people and desired their obedience. Elijah prayed for the Lord God to validate His prophet's ministry. He wanted Israel to know he was God's servant and had done all these things at God's command. Elijah did not seek personal fame or justification—he wanted Israel to know the Lord still participated in their daily lives by providing guidance through His prophets. Elijah finally asked God to answer his prayer so the Israelites would know the Lord is God. The people had been content to waver between commitment to Baal and the Lord God. Elijah wanted the Lord to demonstrate His power so the people would clearly see, turn from their sin, and follow the Lord.

Look again at verse 39. What stands out to you about the people's response to Elijah's miracle? What did they affirm about God? What had changed between this verse and verse 21?



Think back on your spiritual journey. What is a moment that stands out to you when you proclaimed with confidence, “The Lord, he is God”(v. 39)?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does a lack of faith in prayer give evidence that we have a wrong view of God?

What keeps us in a place of intellectual confidence in what God could do instead of a faith-based experience of depending on God to do something?

Where do you need strength right now to trust God in faith? How can our group help?

PRAYER

Thank God for His wisdom and strength when we are facing overwhelming odds in the world. Ask Him to help us grow so that our prayers will be true prayers of faith, depending on Him to do what only He can.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week’s scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Elijah.

January 29, 2023 --- 1 Kings 18:41-46

