

Trusting the God of Wonders

God is able to do tremendous things through those who seek and trust Him.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

1 Kings 18:16-46

July 26, 2020

(1 Kings 18:16-46) 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 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. ⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." ⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- **What do you consider to be one of your greatest accomplishments? Few feats are accomplished without the help of others. Who came alongside you, and how did they help you?**

There is a tremendous sense of satisfaction coinciding with the accomplishment of a great task. Whether it's graduating from high school or starting a successful business, there is a tremendous sense of satisfaction and pride in one's work when that feat is completed. Yet even our most personal triumphs are not accomplished in a vacuum. There are always others standing alongside us who help us accomplish our goals.

Yet perhaps you've experienced something like Elijah did, as described in 1 Kings 18. Elijah's greatest achievement as a prophet was not something he did, but what God did through him. God did not help Elijah accomplish something great; He worked through Elijah to do something miraculous. There is much to learn from this story, but this one thing is true: God is able to do tremendous things through those who seek and trust Him.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

In 1 Kings 17, we read that after Elijah announced to wicked King Ahab that God would cause a great drought on the land, the prophet departed from Israel for a period of three years. God provided for Elijah in miraculous ways. At the end of three years, the word of the Lord came to Elijah that he would send rain to the land (1 Kings 18:1-15).

Have a volunteer read 1 Kings 18:16-21

- **In what sense might Elijah have been a "destroyer" or "troubler" of Israel (v. 17)? Was there any substance to Ahab's accusation?**
- **How did Elijah respond to Ahab's false accusations? What can we learn from Elijah's response about trusting God when falsely accused?**

Looking only at his circumstances, Elijah had every reason to cower under Ahab's accusations. Yet Elijah trusted in the truthful God to defend him before a lying earthly king. It is easy to make decisions based on what is happening before us, but it is essential we make decisions based on what is true. Put another way, it is best that we live our lives in reverence and awe of the One True God, rather than in fear of those who falsely accuse us.

Have a volunteer read 1 Kings 18:22-29

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 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).

- **What was Elijah hoping to accomplish by establishing the contest?**
- **Who had more conviction about the ability of their god—Elijah or the prophets of Baal? What does this say about the nature of faith?**

Elijah's goal was to eliminate Baal from consideration when his people (the Israelites) considered theological matters. Much faith in a non-existent god is no faith at all, while little faith in the right God is great faith indeed.

Have a volunteer read 1 Kings 18:30-39

- **Consider the steps Elijah took to douse the altar, and also consider his prayer. What did Elijah ultimately hope to accomplish in this moment? Was he successful?**

Very dramatically, Elijah rebuilt the altar, now damaged by the frantic Baalistic rites. He then soaked it with water to remove any doubt about the miracle that would soon occur. When Elijah prayed for the fire to fall, he asked the Lord to remind the people that the God to whom He was praying is the covenant God of Israel. Without Yahweh, there would be no Israel. Elijah also prayed that he would be vindicated as the prophet of the covenant God. Finally, Elijah asked that the people know Yahweh is God, and that they have the opportunity to repent at once. This prayer incorporated concern, then, for God's reputation, the validity of the prophet's work, and for the people's wellbeing. God answered his prayer, and the people fell in worship of God.

Have a volunteer read 1 Kings 18:40-46

- **What did the provision of rain after the contest with the prophets of Baal ultimately show about God?**

With his enemies dispatched, Elijah demonstrated one last time that Yahweh is Lord. It was time for rain. He counseled Ahab to hurry home so he would not be caught in the rain. When the rains came, the Lord's victory was completed. God sustained and protected his prophets, while Baal let his die. Yahweh fed the orphans and widows and raised the dead, while Baal let the needy suffer and required Anat to raise him from the dead. Yahweh sent fire and rain from heaven, but Baal could not respond to his most valiant worshipers. A god like Baal is no God at all. A God like Yahweh must be God of all. The rain that fell was not just rain; rather, it was evidence of the Lord's absolute sovereignty over nature and human affairs.

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **Is there something taking place in your life in which you need God to work, but you are not trusting God to do so? How will you build your trust in God once again?**
- **When have you experienced walking by faith – doing something God wanted you to do that didn't make sense to others and seemed risky to you at the time? What was the result? How did God show up and prove Himself faithful?**
- **The gospel forces us to decide: will we trust God or trust ourselves? Elijah forced this moment of decision with the people of Israel in v. 21. When they saw God's power demonstrated and the lack of power of Baal, they chose to repent and return to God. How is God using your life to demonstrate the power of the gospel to those around you? (See Joshua 24:15; James 4:1-10 for more on choosing)**

PRAYER: Pray for boldness to stand for God in all circumstances of your life. Ask God to reveal Himself to you and show you great and mighty things that you do not know apart from Him (cf. Jer. 33:3).

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Jonah 1-2
 DAY 2 – Jonah 3-4
 DAY 3 – Hosea 1-3
 DAY 4 – Amos 1:1, 9
 DAY 5 – Joel 1-3

KEY VERSE: Jonah 4:11

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

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OUR VISION

To be a church
 for the unchurched,
 here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

18:1-46 This chapter describes one of history's great power encounters between God and evil; it is comparable to the encounter between the Lord and the gods of Egypt before the exodus. The prestige of Baal-melkart, with his association with Phoenician prosperity, was comparable to the historic prestige of the gods of Egypt. The power encounter with Egypt freed the Israelites from physical bondage. One might expect that God's confrontation with Baal-melkart freed Israel from spiritual bondage, but it is hard to find evidence for this. Neither Ahab nor Jezebel repented. The moral life of the northern kingdom was not noticeably influenced. But we cannot know how much worse things would have gone for faith in Yahweh without this encounter. Perhaps the 7,000 (19:18) who had not bowed to Baal were encouraged and strengthened, and thus kept the faith. Humanly speaking, without such manifestations of God's power as these, Hebrew faith might have perished long before the exile.

18:17 Despite Ahab's bravery and abilities in many areas, his accusation against Elijah showed that willful sin can blind a person to reality.

18:18-19 Elijah immediately took the conversation to the crucial issue—Ahab's disobedience of God. Then Elijah issued his challenge to set up a carefully planned and publicized power encounter pitting Elijah against the prophets of Baal and his consort, Asherah. Asherah is a generic name for any divine consort of any fertility god, but is also sometimes a title or name for a particular goddess.

18:20-21 From the course of events, we can see that some of the worshipers of Baal really believed in the power of their deity and that many who should have followed the Lord did not have much faith. Therefore, for many of the observers, this was a genuine open-ended power encounter to discover which deity was stronger.

18:22-25 Elijah then proposed the terms of the test: whichever god miraculously ignited and burned his sacrifice would prove to be the true deity who was worthy of the people's allegiance. Since Baal was the storm god, his followers believed he could answer with fire (lightning). But this encounter would show which deity really controlled the weather and provided what the people needed. At the same time, it would show who was a destroyer of Israel, rebellious Ahab or the Lord's prophet Elijah.

18:26 The priests of Baal entered into the contest with great zeal. The HCSB takes their dancing as imitating the steps of a lame person, since it uses the same Hebrew word as the one describing Mephibosheth (2Sam 4:4). Perhaps they danced this way as a result of their self-inflicted injuries (1Ki 18:28).

18:27 The Hebrew original possibly indicates that Elijah ridiculed Baal for relieving himself. Reducing deities to any level of human behavior is an insult. Therefore any suggestion that Baal was drawn away to perform a creaturely necessity was a poignant blow by Elijah.

18:28-29 The fanatical zeal of the priests of Baal led them to cut themselves. Some suggest that this self-inflicted pain may have been aimed at gaining the pity of the other gods so they would release Baal from his mythological death and thus bring rain. If this is true, these Baal worshipers were vicariously suffering pain for their god.

18:30-32 These verses draw on powerful symbols and names from the past— 12 stones for the 12 tribes, and Israel, the name that Yahweh, the God of their covenant, had given them.

18:33-35 Elijah took steps to avoid any appearance of trickery or fraud. If his God could get a drenching wet sacrifice to burn, his God was God indeed.

18:36-39 Elijah's prayer was a powerful statement of the theology of God's great works. Just as the temple singers declared God's great works so the world could know God (Ps 66:3-4), Elijah prayed for a miraculous sign so this people would know that You, Yahweh, are God. The simplicity of Elijah's procedure is impressive. The prophet prayed, and the sacrifice was miraculously burned.

18:40 Elijah executed God's judgment on the false prophets that Moses commanded in Dt 13:5,13-18; 17:2-5. This was the law for the covenant community, God's holy nation.

18:41-46 Two final miraculous events on this day were (1) the coming of the rain as a result of Elijah's prayer and (2) Elijah's supernatural strength in leaving the scene and passing Ahab's chariot before the storm. Typically, the act of preceding the king's chariot could have been a friendly overture. It was an act of honor to the king and an honor to the runner to be permitted to run before the king. But if this was Elijah's intent, it was lost on Ahab and Jezebel.