

October 1 – 1 Kings 17-19

Elijah and Covenant Renewal

Large Group Teaching Review

Chapters 17–19 represent a slowing down of the narrative pace of 1 Kings, as God raises up the prophet Elijah to confront the Baal worship introduced to Israel by Ahab and his foreign wife, Jezebel. In chapter 17, God sustains Elijah through drought, first through ravens at the Cherith brook and then through a widow in Zarephath. Chapter 18 narrates a dramatic showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, as the Lord reveals that he is the true God and brings the drought to an end. In chapter 19 a disillusioned Elijah flees from Jezebel, and his successor, Elisha, is announced.

First Kings 17–19 shows that the God of Israel, not Baal, is the true God, and that he accomplishes his purposes amid the changing seasons of life.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE LORD ALONE IS GOD. All throughout Israel's history, God calls his people to exclusive, unrivaled commitment and worship (e.g., Deut. 6:4–5). The people of Israel, from the golden calf of Aaron (Exodus 32) to the golden calves of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25–33), frequently turn aside from this calling to worship God alone, as they worship other gods instead. Perhaps in no other place in the Bible is God's exclusive claim to deity more evident, or the choice between the true God and idols more poignant, than in 1 Kings 18. As the prophets of Baal cry out for an answer during the contest at Carmel, we read that "there was no voice, and no one answered" (1 Kings 18:26); "no one answered; no one paid attention" (v. 29). The story emphasizes the absolute powerlessness of idols and the Lord's exclusive power to save. This theme will be picked up again and again in the prophets (e.g., Hab. 2:18–20), and in the New Testament Paul will declare, "We know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one'" (1 Cor. 8:4).

Theological Soundings

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS. God is faithful to Elijah throughout these chapters, as seen in his providing for Elijah's needs during drought, protecting him from Ahab's spies, answering his prayer for fire from heaven, and gently confronting him in his disillusionment and self-pity. He is faithful to his people as well: judging evil, preserving a remnant, and fulfilling his promises. When Elijah laments that he is the only true prophet left, for instance, God announces his plans to stamp out further rebellion through Jehu and Elisha (19:17).

These chapters evidence God's resourcefulness in bringing about his purposes. Although Elijah cannot see it, God is in the gentle whisper of chapter 19 as well as the fire from heaven of chapter 18—and he is just as able to carry forward his plan through preserving a remnant as through national revival.

Small Groups

Opening Announcements

1. Get-to-know-you question: What's your dream vacation destination?
2. Fall Event/remind them *again* about the medical release form

Study Questions

Elijah During the Drought (1 Kings 17)

In Canaanite religion, Baal was thought to be the god of storms, holding particular power over rain and fertility. In light of this, why do you think God sent judgment in the specific form of a drought? What message would this have sent?

What is the widow's response when Elijah raises her son from the grave (17:24)? What light might this shed on the purpose of this episode in relation to the larger context of the struggle between Baal and the God of Israel throughout these chapters?

The Contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)

The contest on Mount Carmel in 18:20–40 demonstrates unmistakably that the Lord, not Baal, is the true and living God. How do the details of the story reinforce this message? Consider, for instance, Elijah's taunting (18:27), the extremes to which the prophets of Baal go (18:28–29), and the extra water poured on Elijah's altar (18:33–40).

Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19)

At Horeb, God appears to Elijah through various natural phenomena (a wind, an earthquake, and a fire), but each time the text repeats, “The Lord was not in [it].” Then God sends a “low whisper,” and the refrain is not repeated. What do you think God is seeking to communicate to Elijah at this point? Based on the fact that Elijah responds in identical language before and after this episode (see 19:10, 14), do you think he got the message?

Throughout 1 Kings 18–19, Elijah expresses the belief that he is the only true prophet left in Israel (18:22; 19:10, 14). However, God declares that he has preserved a remnant of seven thousand of his people (19:18). What do you think caused Elijah to overlook all of these others who were loyal to the Lord? How do you think Christians can fall into a similar mindset concerning the church today?

Gospel Glimpses

DEATH AND RESURRECTION. The great message of 1 Kings 17–19 is that God, not Baal, is the true God, a message particularly emphasized in Elijah’s raising of the widow’s son (17:17–24). In Canaanite thought, Baal was believed to periodically die, submitting to the god of death, Mot, before coming back to life during the rainy season. The resurrection of the widow’s son reinforces that it is the God of Israel, not Baal, who holds power over the grave—just as the drought reveals that it is the God of Israel who controls the weather. God’s power over the grave would be more fully manifested later in redemptive history through the person of Christ, who would conquer death forever by submitting to it himself before rising again.

Application

1. God show up to Elijah in a “low whisper.” How has God shown up in your life in quiet and simple ways? What does that tell you about His care for you?
2. Elijah is tempted to think He is alone in following God. How are you tempted to feel alone in following God? How does God’s response to Elijah encourage you?

Prayer

Thank God for who He is and what He has done by using the alphabet as a guide (1st person thanks God that He is All-Knowing, second person thanks God that He makes Beautiful things, 3rd Person thanks God that He is Creator, etc.). See how far you can make it through the alphabet!