

1 Kings 18

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings 18?

Last week we began to study the incredible life and faith of God's prophet Elijah. Remember at this point the northern kingdom of Israel is under the reign of wicked king Ahab. And God sent Elijah to declare a drought, which lasted for 3 ½ years.

Tonight we see how this drought comes to an end as one of the most dramatic scenes in all the Bible unfolds, as Elijah faces off with the false prophets of Baal

The title of tonight's message is The victory on Carmel

Let's pray

1-2

1 And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. Earlier, God told Elijah to hide himself. Now it was time to present himself. As we see throughout the bible there is a time to retreat and be alone with God, and there is also a time to present yourself to the world by taking action.

3 And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly. Now there are several men named Obadiah in the Bible, so we can't say for sure if this is the same one mentioned later on in the OT.

The Hebrew name Obadiah means "Worshipper of Yahweh" or "Servant of Yahweh."

4 For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.) It's interesting, both Elijah and Obadiah lived in an evil, apostate time. They both were faced with an ungodly culture under a ruthless king and his wicked wife. But their witness for God took on very different forms.

We saw last week how Elijah stood on the outside of the culture – he hid by the brook - then lived in exile. Finally, God uses him to prophesy against the ungodliness.

Yet, Obadiah works from within the culture - he serves God in the king's court. When Jezebel orders the execution of God's spokesmen, Obadiah comes to the rescue of 100 prophets. He hides them, feeds them, and protects them.

This is still the same thing that God does today! God calls some believers to a ministry of confrontation. Some Christians are called by God to engage in supernatural showdowns. They point out the ungodliness of the culture, and call people to repent in dramatic public displays. Yet God calls other believers to work behind the scenes – permeating the ungodly culture with godly influence. They shine their light, and do what they can for God within the system.

God used both Elijah and Obadiah for both confrontation and infiltration.

This is another example of why it's such a mistake to compare ministries!

Changing gears for a moment, we get droughts here in the midwest from time to time, but because our culture is no longer agrarian, droughts typically pose a nuisance, not a life or death situation.

But remember, it hasn't rained for 3 years and 6 months. This would lead to desperation. Look at verse 5-6

5 And Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock." 6 So they divided the land between them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. The drought was so severe that King Ahab himself and his trusted servant Obadiah were out searching for pasture for the horses and mules to graze on.

Think about what's happening. The king doesn't go out to search for pasture. The king stays in his Kingdom and sends his servants out.

These are desperate times.

7-11

7 Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, "Is that you, my lord Elijah?"

8 And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your master, 'Elijah is here.' "

9 So he said, “How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? 10 As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, ‘He is not here,’ he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. 11 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here” ’! Obadiah feared that if he announced to King Ahab that he met Elijah, Ahab would punish Obadiah for letting Elijah get away. 12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the LORD will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. 13 Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid one hundred men of the LORD’s prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? Surveyors have counted over 2,000 caves in the Mount Carmel area.14-16

14 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here.” ’ He will kill me!”

15 Then Elijah said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.”

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Elijah responded to Obadiah’s legitimate fears and tells him that he’ll meet Ahab face to face that very day.

17 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” Ahab was easily the worst, most ungodly king that Israel had so far. Yet he’s so misguided and deceived by his sin, he blames the godly prophet Elijah for

the problems of Israel. We see the same today in our wicked culture don't we, where pagans and idolaters and sodomites are blaming Christians for what ails them!

18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. This is the problem with disobedience to God. Disobedience always brings problems, heartache and heartbreak. But sadly some people are so entrenched in their sin they refuse to be obedient to the One who not only made them, but Almighty God who created them.

19 Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah,[fn] who eat at Jezebel's table." Now it's important to know that later on in verse 36, it makes it clear that Elijah did all this at the command of God. This wasn't Elijah's clever idea or strategy. This was a God-inspired plan that Elijah obeyed.

It was important to confront and eliminate these prophets of Baal before God sent rain to the land of Israel. The whole point of gathering the nation together was so that the people understood that when the the rain came to end the drought, it came from Yahweh, not from Baal.

20 So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. **SHOW PIC** Mt Carmel is one of our first stops on our tours of Israel. We study 1 Kings 18, and

you can see an entire 360 degree panorama from this vantage point. It's absolutely breathtaking, and if you're coming with us next year, you'll study this chapter on location! **CLOSE PIC**

Ahab accepts the challenge of Elijah, and arranges a wild west style spiritual showdown on the slopes of Mount Carmel, and all of Israel is called to be witnesses. Mount Carmel borders the Valley of Jezreel - plenty of room for lots of people.

Knowing it hasn't rained for 3 ½ years, you better believe these false prophets of Baal hated Elijah. And because King Ahab and Queen Jezebel promoted Baal worship, you can bet these false prophets enthusiastically promoted the persecution of any true follower of God.

But over the last three years, these fakes had been severely humbled by Elijah and the drought sustained by Elijah's prayers. All their cries to the weather-god Baal were ineffective for three years. They hated this prophet of God who humiliated them. So you can imagine the hatred and animosity that permeated through the crowds

21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. This is a sad indictment. The nation of Israel was more concerned with convenience rather than commitment. But Elijah boldly declares to the people-it's time to decide. Elijah is drawing the proverbial line in the sand.

And notice in response, “But the people answered him not a word.”

No matter what the world may try and tell us, there is no riding the fence spiritually. Joshua said something similar to the nation in Joshua 24:15 “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

And Jesus said in

Matthew 12:30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

Yet when the multitudes are now faced with this monumental decision-there was no objection and no repentance. The people lacked the courage to either defend their position or to change it. They just wanted to be left alone, to do their own thing without being questioned. Sound familiar? Much like America today!

22 Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Don’t miss this-this was not a true statement by Elijah about himself was it? Elijah was just told that very day by Obadiah that Obadiah had sheltered 100 prophets of God-50 to a cave to protect them from the persecution of Jezebel and Ahab.

Is Elijah intentionally lying, is he forgetting, is he over dramatizing?? I don’t know.

This is one of my favorite things about the bible, and one of the most telling factors for its authenticity and reliability. The bible makes NO ATTEMPT to gloss over the shortcomings of its most prominent subjects.

23-24

23 Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. 24 Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.” The rules of this supernatural showdown are simple. The fire was not come from either Elijah or the prophets of Baal. The fire to light the sacrifices had to be supernatural in origin, and supplied by either Baal or Yahweh.

Remember, it was thought that Baal was the sky-god, lord of the weather and the sender of lightning (thought to be fire from the sky). If Baal were real, he certainly could send fire from heaven.

On the surface, this looks like a mismatch! Elijah was terribly outnumbered –just the prophets of Baal are 450 to 1. But of course that’s from the human point of view. Elijah had God on his side, and our God more than makes up for any numerical deficit.

Have you noticed that throughout the Bible we see God loves to use statistical minorities and anomalies to accomplish His will? Gideon and the 300, the 12 apostles, Jonathan and his armor

bearer, David and Goliath, the list goes on and on. This way no one could ever say the results were from anyone but God.

I'm convinced the reason we don't see as many miracles today as we do in the book of the Bible is because there is 1 underlying thread to all miracles. Study every miracle in the Bible, and they all have something in common, they all share 1 necessary ingredient. And what is that necessary ingredient for a miracle? It's a hopeless situation.

I think we are so privileged in this country that we do everything we can to avoid hopeless situations, so we don't cry out to God the same way they did in the Bible. Just my opinion.

25-26

25 Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it."

26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. The prophets of Baal get first crack. They cry out from morning until noon, but no fire comes. They're dancing around, chanting and wailing, trying to get Baal's attention.

But I wonder-why did they expect anything different-this was the same result for the last 3 ½ years! Baal was lord of the weather. They'd been crying out to him to end the drought, but to no avail.

27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.” In contrast to Baal we read in **Psalm 121:4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

Yahweh, the true God, is always attentive to our prayers.

Now in the Hebrew, some translate Elijah’s mocking as going so far as questioning if Baal won’t answer them because he’s busy on the toilet!

Either way, you get the point...

And this drives the prophets of Baal to further lunacy...

28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

Cutting, where a person harms themselves, is nothing new. It’s a lie from Satan that’s been around since sin.

29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. This is the sad result of worshiping an imaginary god or the god of our own making. A person may dedicate great sincerity, sacrifice, and devotion to such gods, but it means nothing. There is no one there to answer.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. When it was Elijah’s turn to sacrifice, he first wanted to get the attention of the people. They

needed to pay attention so they would see that the LORD was the true God, in contrast to the silent Baal.

Evidently there was once an altar of the LORD at Carmel and the first thing Elijah does is restores the altar for worship.

31-35

31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."^[fn] 32 Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." 34 Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. 35 So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water. And remember, what's plaguing the nation at this point-a drought. Elijah pours out nearly 300 gallons of rare, precious water.

Elijah did this, confident that it was no harder for God to ignite a wet sacrifice than it was for Him to set a dry one ablaze.

Sometimes we think what's easy for us is easy for God, and what's hard for us must be hard for God. Nothing is too hard for God!

Luke 18:27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

36 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God

of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. It was important for the people of Israel to know who their God was, and who God's servant was. How often do people today try to make God their servant!

Notice the end of verse 36- Elijah did this according to the word of God. It wasn't prompted because of his own cleverness, or enthusiastic planning. God led Elijah to this showdown with the prophets of Baal.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."God is about to light a barbecue. Elijah makes sure there is no doubt as to the source of the miracle. He prays a simple prayer. There's no dancing - no chanting - no slashing – just a simple request.

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. "There was no denying the source of the miracle. The moment Elijah addresses the God of Israel – fire falls. The fire ignites the wet wood - burns up the soaked meat – and even vaporizes the water in the trench. Everything is consumed.

39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God! At this moment, the people were completely persuaded. Asked to choose between Baal and Yahweh, the choice was easy- obviously, the LORD is God.

Tragically, this was only a momentary persuasion. There was no lasting revival in Israel. The people were persuaded, but not lastingly changed.

40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there. Under the Law of Moses the death penalty was prescribed for a false prophet.

41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain." Remember, it hasn't rained for 3½ years. And this day is no different than any other day. Elijah hears rain, but there's not a cloud in the sky.

42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, Note Elijah's posture. This is the only time in the Bible when we see a person curl up in a ball to pray.

43 and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again." Carmel is by the coast. From the top of the mount you can look westward to the Mediterranean. And through sheer persistence and faith, Elijah tells his servant to keep looking for a sign of rain at the mediterranean.

This is of course a picture for you and I regarding persistence in prayer. **Luke 11:5 And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his**

journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 If a son asks for bread[fn] from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?"

44 Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'" In James 5 the apostle is teaching the Church on the power of prayer. He reaches into the Old Testament for an illustration, and guess who he pulls out? **James 5:17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. Elijah sees a small cloud, and knows it's the Lord.

45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. 46 Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. In another show of God's supernatural

power, Ahab, riding on a chariot, goes slower on this 14 mile journey than Elijah running