

Hanging Out With Pagans

1 Kings 17 & 18

How do you interact with people who are not followers of Christ?

How do you interact with people who are enemies of Christ?

1 Kings 17 & 18 deals with a beautiful event in Elijah's life, Where he promised a drought that lasted for three years.

This story has two major players, Elijah and King Ahab.

However, we want to look at two minor players in this story,

The widow who lived at Zarephath, and Obidiah, who was in charge of the palace.

What Does The Bible Say?

Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab,
“As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve
—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I
give the word!” (1 Kings 17:1 NLT)

**Elijah’s ministry was committed to promoting Yahweh over
the more popular deity Baal, the ancient Canaanite storm
god.**

**Ahab is the seventh king of Israel (the northern kingdom),
known for being the most wicked king in the history of Israel
(1 Kgs 16:30). He worshipped Baal.**

8 Then the Lord said to Elijah, 9 “Go and live in the village of
Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow
there to feed you.” (1 Kings 17:8–9 NLT)

**King Ahab was looking Elijah, God hid him in the homeland
of Jezebel, the wife of the King Ahab.**

12 But she said, “I swear by the Lord your God that I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.”

13 But Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you’ve said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what’s left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!”

15 So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. 16 There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah. (1 Kings 17:12–16 NLT)

Elijah calmed her fears of hunger and imminent death.

Was this woman a follower of God?

The jury is out on this. We know that the widow was a Gentile and recognized the Jewish God. When her son died, she said to Elijah, Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?” (1 Kings 17:18)

She was at least a person of peace.

A person of peace does the following:

- welcome you**
- receive you**
- be open to you and your friendship**
- be open to what you have to say about Jesus**
- be interested in and open to the life you live as a follower of Jesus**
- assist or serve you in some ways**

We see persons of peace in the New Testament.

Who are persons of peace in your life?

Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria. 3 So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace.

(Obadiah was a devoted follower of the Lord. 4 Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.) 5 Ahab said to Obadiah, "We must check every spring and valley in the land to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules." 6 So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. (1 Kings 18:2–6 NLT)

Obadiah's King was evil, and yet he chose to work for him.

As a result, he was able to do the Lord's work even in a terrible atmosphere.

What if your employer is evil like King Ahab?

How Can You Obey?

Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character." (1 Corinthians 15:33 NLT)

Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble. (Proverbs 13:20 NLT)

16 But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." (Mark 2:16–17 NLT)

We need to hang out with two kinds of people: people that need Jesus and people that help you see Jesus better.

If you have been a Christian for more than three years, you probably spend more time with the second group than the first.

How are you planning to spend more time with people that need Jesus?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Additional Notes:

This week's Bible & Science is from Ham, Ken, and Bodie Hodge. *The New Answers Book 1*. Master Books, Green Forrest, AR, 2006, 166.

Explore:

Persons of peace in the new Testament:

Luke 7:1–10 (The Centurion)

John 4:1–30 (The Samaritan Woman)

Acts 8:26–40 (The Ethiopian Eunuch)

Acts 10:9–11:1 (Cornelius)

Acts 16:13–15 (Lydia)

Acts 16:22–38 (The Philippian Jailer)

We can often recognize the person of peace because they will:

welcome you

receive you

be open to you and your friendship

be open to what you have to say about Jesus

be interested in and open to the life you live as a follower of
Jesus

assist or serve you in some ways

Explore:

18:7–12a. Obadiah recognized Elijah when they met somewhere
outside Samaria; Elijah was a “wanted” man in Israel. Out of

respect for the prophet, Obadiah bowed down to the ground. He could hardly believe he had found Elijah. Elijah, wanting to talk with Ahab (vv. 1–2), asked Obadiah to announce him to his master. Obadiah, however, was afraid that Elijah would disappear again. Obadiah explained to the prophet how Ahab had searched for him at home and abroad (v. 10) to no avail. Obadiah affirmed that fact by the familiar words, As surely as the Lord your God lives (cf. 17:1, 12). If he reported to his king that Elijah had been found, and then could not produce him (the Spirit of the Lord may carry you away; cf. 2 Kings 2:16), Ahab would regard Obadiah's words as a mocking trick and would probably execute him.

18:12b–15. To convince Elijah that his concern was sincere, Obadiah related proof that he was a devout believer in the Lord (cf. v. 3) since his youth. Obadiah seemed to think Elijah would have heard about his hiding and feeding the prophets of the Lord. Perhaps this was known among many of the faithful in

Israel, especially the prophets, though of course not by Jezebel or her sympathizers. Elijah assured Obadiah that he would not disappear but would indeed stand before Ahab that same day.

Elijah's description of God as the Lord (Yahweh) Almighty who lives and whom Elijah served (cf. 17:1; 18:36) indicates that he was confident in God's ability to handle the physical and spiritual situation in Israel, an assurance that had grown as a result of his experiences at Kerith and Zarephath.

Thomas L. Constable, "1 Kings," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F.

Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 525.

Explore:

Elijah challenged Ahab to summon the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal and Asherah to a showdown with him. The actual contest would be 450 prophets of Baal against one

prophet of God! That was the situation Elijah faced on Mount Carmel. He was in a very lonely position. Elijah challenged the people to end their double mindedness and decide whom they would worship, God or Baal. Both Elijah and the prophets of Baal were to prepare an altar and a bull for a sacrifice. Then, both sides were to call upon their god, and the one who answered by sending fire was to be acknowledged as the true God. As Elijah partnered with God to do His will, he was never alone and could withstand even the worst odds.

Explore:

The prophets of Baal prepared an altar. Then they spent the morning praying to their god, but to no avail. They limped and danced around their altar. When Elijah taunted them for their god's silence, they mutilated themselves. But it was all in vain. Then Elijah built an altar and dug a trench around it. He cut a bull into pieces and instructed that the sacrifice and the

wood be soaked in water three times, which caused the trench around the altar to fill with water. Elijah prayed and asked God to answer his prayer to show that He is the true God and turn the hearts of His people back to Him. The Lord responded and fire came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the surrounding dust and water. Many people recognized Elijah's God was indeed the true God! Elijah then put the false prophets to death just as God commanded.

Explore:

Elijah told Ahab that heavy rain was coming. At the heart of prayer is understanding that we need God to meet our needs.

This is powerfully seen in Elijah's prayer on the mountain.

Elijah's prayer is a reminder that it is not always the length of our prayer that is important, but our faith in God to accomplish His will. Elijah had taken a stand for truth and then prayed for God to do what He said He would do. Elijah kept praying and a

small cloud appeared that quickly grew until the entire sky was dark and ominous. In fulfillment of Elijah's word, the clouds and wind arrived followed by torrential rains. Through this encounter, Elijah had not only defeated the prophets of Baal but had also disquieted and humbled Jezebel, a deed that would not go unnoticed.

Explore:

One of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament emerges to oppose Ahab. His name is Elijah.

Elijah steps forward to confront Ahab with the word and power of Israel's true God. He declares that the whole land will suffer drought—until Elijah himself gives the word for rain to fall again (17:1–6).

Elijah is challenging the widespread faith in Baal. Baal is the old Canaanite god of rain, whose dying brings drought and whose

rising brings new life. Now the Lord, the God of Israel, will be shown to be the true God.

As the drought takes hold, God protects Elijah in hiding by the Kerith Ravine. There the prophet has a steady supply of water, and ravens bring him food.

Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 155.

Explore:

“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and ... asked that He would show them a sign from heaven” (Matt. 16:1). “So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us ?” (John 2:18). “Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe” (John 4:48). There is embedded in the consciousness of humankind an almost irrepressible desire for rational, visible proofs on which

to base beliefs. “Reason before faith” is the order of unregenerate skepticism. But Jesus reversed the order. Faith comes first; then reason follows to undergird and confirm. But the yearning for evidence, so deeply embedded in human experience, has been reinforced in our day by reverence for the scientific method with its quest for demonstrated certainty. The desire for convincing signs dies slowly.

That desire was very much alive in Elijah’s day. The people wanted some visible proof that Yahweh was the true God. And this time God was willing to give them a spectacular sign.

The conversation between the king and the prophet beginning in verse 17 confirms that Ahab still blamed the drought on Elijah’s arbitrary stubbornness, not on his own idolatry. Like Nathan’s “Thou art the man,” Elijah sets the record straight. Israel is troubled because Ahab has replicated his father Omri’s disobedience and added to it his own idolatry. He has “followed

the Baals.” The plural form is used in derision, contrasting the multiple village shrines across the land with the awesome ideal of one God. A great national contest will settle once and for all who is the true God.

Carmel, the location of Elijah’s “contest,” means “the garden land.” It is a low range of mountains running northwest to southeast from the Mediterranean Sea to the fertile Plain of Esdraelon. After years of Sunday school lessons about this event, in which I pictured Mount Carmel as a tall snow-capped peak like Mount McKinley, I was somewhat disappointed to see it for myself on our first trip to Israel. But I came to realize how much better the real mountain fit the passage than did my imagined peak. Today, tour guides show modern travelers the spot where tradition claims the contest took place. And of all the historical sites in Israel, this one seems most believable. The location is called “El Muhraka,” literally, “the place of burning.” It is a level plateau halfway up Mount Carmel where a large

crowd could have easily gathered. One cannot see the Mediterranean from here, but a short climb higher up the mountain opens up a dramatic view (cf. vv. 42–44). Just below the plateau the Brook Kishon still flows, and beside it is a huge rock mound called “Tel el Qassis” or “Priest’s Mound” where tradition says the slaughter of the prophets of Baal took place (cf. v. 40). There are springs in the area from which the water to douse the altar could have been drawn without traveling to the brook (cf. vv. 33–35). Standing on the site helps one to visualize the dramatic scene described by our author.

It was decision time. No one could avoid it. Ahab was mistaken. One cannot serve Yahweh and Baal together. “If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (v. 21). The phrase, “How long will you falter between two opinions?” is difficult to translate clearly. Therefore, every translation of this phrase is someone’s interpretation of what it means. “Falter” means “to limp, halt, hop, dance, or leap.” It is the same word used in verse

26 where the prophets of Baal “leaped” about the altar. There it probably refers to the typical ritual dance used in the worship of Baal, similar to the low, squatting dance of the Cossacks. It may explain the term “bending the knee to Baal.”

The word translated “opinions” speaks of “clefts, branches, forks in a tree limb or in a road.” So, even though an exact translation is difficult, the obvious meaning is: “How long will you keep on dancing from one leg to the other, like a bird trying to straddle a widening branch or a man trying to take both forks of a road at the same time?” In other words, “How long will you try to worship both Yahweh and Baal at the same time?” The statement is clearly a metaphor to condemn halfhearted, double-minded indecision.

In order to forestall any accusations of unfairness, Elijah set the conditions of the contest to give every possible concession to the prophets of Baal: (1) They could be first to choose the sacrifice.

(2) They could pray first and for as long as they wished. (3) The proof-sign was to be fire. Since Baal was supposed to be the god of the sun, the god of the storm, they could not object. So they set up their altar and called on their god to answer.

Elijah's taunts were classic sarcasms. One slur was especially abrasive. The phrase translated "he is busy" has been translated in other versions: "he is pursuing," "he is gone aside," "he is engaged," "he has business to transact," or "he hath an occasion to retire." Most commentators believe the phrase is a euphemism for "turning aside for a call of nature," or "going to the privy." The mockery incited the Baalists to accelerate their frenzies as they carried on until the evening sacrifice.

The word "evening" is not in the Hebrew text and has been added by translators. The Hebrew word *minḥā* probably refers to the traditional ninth hour of prayer at about three o'clock in the

afternoon. That gave Elijah time for his own calm and deliberate preparations.

How composed and self-assured he is in contrast to the wild acrobatics of the Baal worshipers. There must have been nearby a previous altar to Yahweh which had been torn down, maybe by Jezebel's followers. From the old altar Elijah took twelve stones from which to symbolically form the base of a new altar. The trench, as big as the square area of field in which two seahs (about five gallons) of grain might be planted, was dug. Then, symbolically, twelve jars of water were poured over it all.

After his simple and dignified prayer, the mighty fire of God fell and consumed sacrifice, altar, stones, water, everything. The people, now convinced, cried out, "The Lord, He is God!"

"Yahweh is Elohim!" Those words in Hebrew were actually Elijah's name! "Yah is El!"

Russell Dilday and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 9 of The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987), 195–197.

Explore:

Assyrian records of the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BC reveal that under Ahab (873–852 BC) “the house of Omri” was a major military player in the resistance of a dozen western allies (including the Arameans of Damascus) against the growing threat of the Assyrians to the east. The account of Ahab's reign in 1 Kgs 16:29–22:40 shows no interest in this event, but ends by highlighting the belligerent relationship that exists between Ahab and Ben-Hadad II (Hadadezer, 880–842 BC) of Damascus, leading ultimately to the Israelite king's death in battle against the Arameans (852 BC). To the biblical narrator this event is not as important for its political implications as it is

for its profoundly spiritual significance; this is Ahab's due punishment for his sponsorship of Baal worship in Israel. Even so, the earlier chapters tend to be preoccupied not with Ahab's relationship to the Arameans, but to his relationship with Elijah, the prophet of Yahweh, and in the end with a second prophet, Micaiah ben Imlah, who predicts his doom (1 Kgs 22). As noted earlier, the narrator casts the entire record of Omride rule as reflections of events transpiring in the heavens, where a spiritual contest for the hearts of the Israelites rages between Yahweh and his prophets, on the one hand, and the forces of Baal, on the other. This contest continues in the following division involving Elisha. In reading these Ahab-Elijah texts we need to study the significance of every episode in the light of that conflict, which reaches its physical and ideological highpoint on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). Once the author has presented the background to that event (16:29–17:24), its nature (18:1–46), and its aftermath (19:1–21), his focus shifts to Ahab's demise at the hands of the

Arameans (20:1–22:40). However, the contest continues under Ahab's successor, Ahaziah, who continues the legacy of his father as an antagonist to true Yahwism but also dies as a victim of that contest—in fulfillment of Elijah's word (2 Kgs 1:1–18). Because Elijah is the principal protagonist on Yahweh's behalf in this spiritual battle, this phase of the conflict between Yahweh and Baal does not end with the death of Ahab, but with the ascension of Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1–18). To grasp the message of the narrator, throughout this compelling account, we must keep our eyes on the actions of Yahweh's prophets and our ears on their speeches.

Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: Old Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1 Ki 16:29–19:21.

Explore:

18:28 Lacerations in Idol Worship

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

It was customary for the heathen to make lacerations in their flesh, not only as a mark of mourning for the dead (see Leviticus 19:28 Tattooing Forbidden), but also as an act of idolatrous worship. This custom was not, however, of Egyptian origin, as were many of the customs practiced in Canaan. J. G. Wilkinson in his book, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, published in 1841, says that the Egyptians beat themselves at the close of their sacrifices, as is shown of some of the illustrations in their tombs. He also says that the custom of cutting was from Syria. The same practice is still followed at the present time among idolaters of different nations. They will cut their flesh in

various ways until they are streaming with blood. They consider that this voluntary blood shedding is meritorious and will help to wash away their sins. Even so, in cult Christianity practiced in such places as the Philippines and Haiti, some of the devotees will flagellate themselves, while others will have themselves nailed to crosses. All as acts of repentance toward a false god and false christ.

James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 244–245.

Explore:

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 (see note at 16:23–28), 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 difficult 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.

Andrew C. Bowling, “1 Kings,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard (Broadman & Holman, 2015), 374.

Explore:

The passage.—After three years God told Elijah to go before Ahab again. Ahab had been looking everywhere for water for his horses. Obediah, a servant of Ahab who had remained true to God, was also looking for water for the king's horses when he met Elijah. Elijah told him to inform Ahab of his whereabouts. He feared at first, but trusted Elijah and did his bidding. When Ahab saw him he said, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" (v. 17). Elijah told Ahab that he and his family were the real troublemakers in Israel because of their sins.

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel. He called all the people of Israel to witness it. He said to them, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (v. 21).

Elijah directed that two bulls be brought. The Baal prophets chose one and he chose the other. It was agreed that the God who answered by fire from heaven would prove to be the true God.

The Baal worshipers called on him all day long, but there was no answer. As they raved on Elijah mocked them and told them to cry louder. He was not only taunting them, he was preaching to the people.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah called all of the people together. He repaired the altar of the true God. He made a huge trench around it. He put the wood and the sacrifice in place. Three times he asked that all of it be drenched in water. It was all soaked and the trench was filled with water.

The prayer of Elijah in verses 36 and 37 is one of the most moving in all the Bible. He prayed for the miracle in order that the people might know Jehovah as the true God. The fire fell

from heaven and consumed the offering, the wood, and the altar itself. Elijah ordered the prophets of Baal seized and killed.

Elijah then predicted rain and prayed for it. Just as God had answered with fire, he answered with rain. Elijah's servant was asked to look for a sign. At first he saw nothing in the sky. He went back to look seven times. Then he saw a small cloud the size of a man's hand. In a little while the sky was black with clouds, wind, and rain!

Special points.—Could the fire from heaven have been a bolt of lightning? If so, it came from a cloudless sky. If it was it would not in any sense disprove the miracle.

The destruction of the prophets of Baal seems severe.

Throughout this section of the Bible there are similar accounts where capital punishment is inflicted on a wholesale scale.

Compare this to Samuel's hacking Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. God himself, having all of the facts, is alone in a

position to order the removal from the earth of persons or nations that are out of harmony with his purposes. We must be sure we know the mind of God. Our judgments must be made in the light of the truth we have after twenty centuries of Christian history. We cannot properly go back to the standards of conduct that prevailed before Christ came.

Truth for today.—Notice the calmness in prayer with which Elijah carried out his preparations on Mount Carmel. Contrast this with the frenzy of the prophets of Baal. It is not the loudness of prayer, nor the number of words, but faith in the true God that really counts. Read Matthew 6:7–8.

Christian people need to take a definite stand. Elijah asked why the people in Israel were “halting between two opinions.” The Revised Standard Version uses the term “limping with two different opinions.” The idea is of the person who hops from one position to the other. Read Matthew 12:25.

Scott L. Tatum, “1 Kings,” in *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1972), 202–203.

Question 1 of 5

How did Noah fit the dinosaurs on the ark?

Question 2 of 5

How does knowing God help us stand for truth when it is not popular?

Question 3 of 5

In what ways might God bring glory to His name when we stand for truth?

Question 4 of 5

What can we do when we associate someone who is very sinful?

Question 5 of 5

What are some reasons our prayers are not answered as we expect?

