



# First Baptist Church Selmer

FIRM FOUNDATION • ELIJAH • 1 KINGS 18:20-39; 19:1-3, 13-18 • 11/5/2023

## MAIN POINT

As we take bold stands for the Lord, we can count on His continuing presence and encouragement.

## INTRODUCTION

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

**What are some examples of Christians taking a bold stand for God in your community? Why isn't the number of believers willing to take a bold stand for God larger?**

**Have you ever felt the sting of opposition because of your faith in Jesus? How did it feel? What did it cost you?**

At some time, all Christians will face the decision whether or not to take a bold stand for God. Believers don't face those situations alone; they can count on God's continuing presence and encouragement.

## UNDERSTANDING

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

The Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah had a series of unfaithful and wicked kings who actually promoted the worship of idols. King Ahab of Israel represented the extreme. He married a Phoenician woman, Jezebel, who was an assertive advocate for worship of Baal. The prophet Elijah had the opportunity to take a bold stand for the Lord.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:20-21.

*20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. (ESV)*

**What problem motivated Elijah to issue his challenge? Why do you think the people were unwilling to commit themselves to the Lord God?**

**If a modern-day Elijah were speaking to our culture, how do you think he might word his challenge in verse 21?**

**What temptations to waver between the Lord and contemporary "baals" exist in our society? What happens if we are reluctant to take a stand for the Lord?**

We can show that we follow God in what we say and do. Often this requires opposing current culture. God's people take a bold stand when they declare their commitment to follow the Lord, even when this commitment leads to criticism or persecution.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:22-39.

*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, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." (ESV)*

**How did the people respond when they saw the answer to Elijah's bold prayer?**

**What does Elijah's prayer reveal about his motive in the contest with the prophets of Baal? What does it show us about his faith?**

**How does God show His power today? How does He make resources available to us to accomplish His purposes without flashing fire from heaven?**

Believers can be emboldened in their stand for the Lord by recognizing and affirming God's answers to their prayers. Seeing God answer prayers lets us know we can pray with confidence. We can rely on God to help us when we take a stand for Him in faith.

Following the intense display of God's power over the prophets of Baal, Elijah commanded that all the prophets of Baal be seized and killed for their transgression against God. News of the prophets' slaughter would then travel back to King Ahab and Jezebel setting the stage for God to use Elijah once again.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER READ 1 KINGS 19:1-3.

*1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (ESV)*

Jezebel's words in verse 2 take the form of a typical Hebrew oath. She was vowing to kill Elijah within 24 hours, and if she was unsuccessful, invited her false gods to kill her instead. God spared Elijah's life. Since Jezebel's gods were false gods, they were of course unable to fulfill her oath.

**What surprises you about the fear and panic Elijah experienced so soon after the amazing victory at Mount Carmel? What caused him to run?**

**Why do you think the Bible exposes the weaknesses of its heroes of the faith? In what ways does this encourage you?**

All Christians face situations that test their faith. Even believers who have taken a bold stand for God in the past may need support to act boldly in new and risky circumstances. We can comfort, pray for, and encourage each other when challenges arise.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:13-18.

*13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 15 And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one*

*who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (ESV)*

**According to verse 14, what was Elijah’s perspective on his situation? What was accurate and inaccurate about his assessment?**

**How did God help Elijah move beyond thinking only of himself?**

**What did God do to reassure and restore Elijah to service?**

Sometimes we need to stop moving and listen in order to hear God speaking. When we remember we are not alone in standing for the Lord, we can find strength to boldly go about the work God has for us. Believers should support one another.

## APPLICATION

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

**In what area of your life are you sitting on the fence and wavering between two opinions with regard to obeying God’s will?**

**How will recalling God’s answers to prayers (yours and those of other believers) help you be bold today?**

**Do you know someone who has served God faithfully and taken a bold stand for Him in the past but is now struggling with discouragement? What can you do to help this person?**

## PRAYER

Is there a situation in your life where you have been silent in the past but you know you need to stand firm for God in the face of opposition? Pray God will help you boldly take that stand starting today.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 KINGS 18:20-39

18:20. The gathering would be a contest of sorts between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Mount Carmel is the highest point of a mountain range running southeasterly from the

Mediterranean Sea along the Valley of Jezreel. Mount Carmel may have long held significance for worshipers of the Lord as well as for Baal worshipers.

18:21. Elijah first confronted the onlooking people. He challenged them with a question (“How long will you hesitate between two opinions?”) followed by a call to decision (“If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him.”) Baal was the most important deity in Canaanite religion. [See Exploration: Baal, below.] He was revered as the storm god who brought rain (and thus fertility) to the land. Elijah’s prophecy of drought (see 17:1) would have been understood as a direct challenge to Baal’s claim of power.

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.

## | 1 KINGS 19:1-3, 13-18

19:1. The queen had not been present on Mount Carmel. Ahab gave her the full report, however, including the fact that Elijah had led the people to eliminate the prophets of Baal. Jezebel's level of commitment to Baal evidently matched Elijah's to the Lord. She responded with the fierceness of a mortally wounded animal. Elijah had provoked an enemy of the Lord to attempt desperate action.

19:2. The queen sent a messenger to Elijah, declaring her promise to deliver the Lord's prophet to the same fate that the prophets of Baal had received. The phrase "May the gods punish me and do so severely" was an oath formula by which Jezebel called down curses on herself if she in fact did not fulfill the obligations of the oath. The gods Jezebel referred to were the now-exposed false deities of the Canaanite pantheon.

19:3. Then Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life. The KJV has "he saw that" for became afraid, but this is a minor difference in manuscript readings. The meaning is essentially the same in both versions: Elijah panicked and fled for his life!

19:13. Suddenly, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" This was a divine question designed not to elicit information but to provoke personal reflection. God wanted Elijah to reassess his life and ministry in light of God's purposes.

19:14. Elijah contended that he had been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts. The problem as he saw it was with the people. Elijah argued, "The Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life." The prophet's answer reveals a profound preoccupation with himself. He referred only to his faithfulness, the discouraging effect of the nation's faithlessness, and his own personal danger. The Lord needed to direct his focus elsewhere.

19:15-16. One way to refocus is to get busy with constructive activity. Emotions often follow when the person—spirit, mind, and body—obeys the Lord.

The new assignment the Lord gave to Elijah was within the normal responsibilities of a prophet. He was to anoint three people: Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and

Elisha as his successor. The last one may have come as a surprise to Elijah. Whatever the reason, Elijah's role in the defeat of Baal worship and the prophetic proclamation to the nation of Israel was coming to an end.

19:17. Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu. This explanation assured Elijah that others would take up the God-given task of standing against the presence of Baal worship in Israel.

19:18. "But I will leave 7,000 in Israel—every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." Events were not nearly so out of control as Elijah had imagined. Perhaps Elijah needed to be reminded of God's sovereign rule over the affairs of men. Perhaps Elijah needed a gentle reminder that God's redemptive work was larger than any one prophet's circumstances. In any event, God reassured Elijah that he was not alone and that God's purposes would ultimately prevail.