

Unit .13

Session .02

The Signs of God's Presence

Scripture



1 Kings 18:31-39; 19:5-8,15-18

31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," **32** and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. **33** And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." **34** And 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** And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. **36** And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. **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."... **5** And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." **6** And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. **7** And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." **8** And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. ... **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."

Intro Options



Main Point:
**Even in our moments
of fear and stress,
God is with us.**

Option 1

What is your favorite “showdown” movie? Many Western movies climax with a gunfight at the end, where sometimes the outnumbered guy or group wins. Sports movies are also popular for telling classic stories of underdog victories.

▪ **What is your favorite underdog triumph story?**

The Bible also contains showdowns, and in many cases the underdog triumphs. Moses, a shepherd, went up against mighty Pharaoh and triumphed over the evil empire. Gideon, who with an army of just 300, won a battle over the Midianites. And perhaps the most famous underdog story would be David and Goliath. In each case, God raised up a leader, a mediator of sorts, who represented the people and, in God’s power, went up against the enemies of darkness. Of course, none of these were underdog stories in the strictest sense because God’s presence was with them, fighting for them. But from a human perspective, they were underdogs.

In 1 Kings 18, we have another story of a mediator-leader, whom God raised up to combat evil: Elijah. After an initial meeting with King Ahab, Elijah appeared before Ahab again. In this meeting, Elijah arranged one of the most memorable showdowns in Scripture. It was a firefight on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the false prophets to prove once and for all who the real God is.

Option 2

The Israelites turned from worshiping the one true God to worshiping Baal. Just as God had instructed them not to do, they gave themselves over to idols. We all worship something. Even if we don’t bow down to an idol made of stone, we all elevate something to the status of “god” in our lives.

Ask the students to list things that could easily become idols. Begin the discussion with an example such as money, power, popularity, social media, and so on. Allow a few minutes of discussion, then answer the following questions as a group:

- **The Israelites’ inability to decide between Baal and God plainly revealed their idolatry. When we find it hard to worship God alone, what do we learn about the hidden idols in our lives?**
- **Why do you think the Bible discusses idolatry so often? Why does God express such contempt for idolatry in the lives of His people?**

TEACHING PLAN

The test of the true God was set by Elijah and accepted by King Ahab and the people of Israel. And so, the contest took place on Mount Carmel, a noted high place for Baal worship. The sacrificial bulls were chosen, the altars built, and the contest commenced. After the prophets of Baal spent most of the day in an attempt to receive an answer, it was Elijah's turn.

Read 1 Kings 18:31-39.



After the prophets of Baal failed, Elijah called all the people to him. He then repaired the altar, which in itself signified Israel's spiritual condition (vv. 30-32). He built the altar properly and used twelve stones. Elijah was calling the people to come back to the covenant God in repentance. Elijah then prepared the altar with the wood and the bull (v. 33a).

Then, Elijah shocked everyone. He requested four jars of water and had those present pour water three times on the burnt offering and on the wood (vv. 33b-34). Elijah wanted everyone to know for sure that what was about to happen could only be explained by the power of God. Next, Elijah prayed that God would burn the wet wood and the sacrifice (vv. 36-37).

In contrast to the lengthy prayers of Baal's prophets, consider how short Elijah's prayer is. (It takes about thirty seconds to read it!) Prayer isn't about the length, volume, or eloquence. It's about praying to the right God with genuine faith. "Baal's boys" had home-field advantage too, but that didn't matter, for God isn't bound to a place.

Finally, notice that Elijah's prayer was all about the glory of God, and his prayer was for rebels to turn to God. That is, he prayed that Israel would know the truth and respond to it with repentance and faith.

▪ **How often do you ask God to turn people to Himself in repentance?**

Hardly at all

Sometimes

Often

Daily



▪ **Elijah stood on the side of truth in the midst of widespread opposition to him and his belief in God. What are some ways we can do the same in our own culture today?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 16, DDG)

Christ's Humiliation

Although God the Son was equal with God and worthy of all the glory God receives, He chose to humble Himself by taking on human flesh. He left His glorious state and came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and He experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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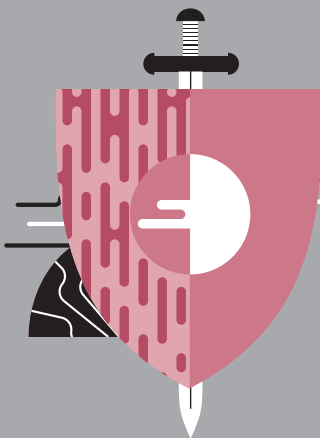
1 Kings 18

31-39. The prophets brought ritual, tradition, ceremony, and religion into their call to Baal. Elijah brought trust when calling upon the one true God. The prophets of Baal demonstrated their belief what the people must do for their god. However, Elijah showed us what the God of glory does for us. What a vast difference between the two views! God wants us to be free to live in relationship with Him, not bind us to bleed out our lives in servitude to false gods, traditions, rituals, idols, and the worship of created things. It is the true God who gives humans true life.

In the contest between Elijah and prophets of Baal, Elijah left no room for the prophets to continue misleading the people of God. He poured so much water over the sacrifice that there was no way it could naturally burn, and no trickster could use sleight of hand or deception. He left no excuse to exchange truth for a falsehood, no physical evidence for God's glory to be denied. Elijah also rebuilt the altar, a visual reminder to the Israelites of their identity as the people of God. Though you may neglect who you are as a Christian, God never forgets your identity in Him.

With no flashy dancing, no wailing or shouting, no self-mutilation, and no extravagant religious routines or exertion, Elijah called upon God to show Himself as the true God. Notice Elijah's intention and motive when he asked God to answer his prayer so that the people would know that He alone is God. Elijah's prayer was for God to receive the honor and glory of this redemptive act. The people, upon seeing God's swift and powerful response, fell to the ground in repentance proclaiming Yahweh as God.

In Defense (p. 18, DDG)



Previously in Israel's history, God sent fire at the inauguration of the tabernacle worship (Lev. 9:24). It signified Yahweh's acceptance of the sacrificial system. Later, David sacrificed, as ordered by God at Ornan's threshing floor, and Yahweh answered with fire, signifying his acceptance of the offering (1 Chron. 21:26). David then said that this particular spot would be the place for the future temple (1 Chron. 22:1). Similarly, when Solomon completed and dedicated the temple, fire again fell, showing God's acceptance of their worship (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Here in our story, the fire from heaven was a sure sign that God accepted Elijah's sacrifice.

TEACHING PLAN

Elijah and the people witnessed a spectacular display of God's power in the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:18-39). In this contest, God proved to the Israelites that He is the Lord of all creation and that Baal was a powerless creation of mankind. The people repented and professed Yahweh as Lord—at least almost all of the people. Jezebel heard about what happened and immediately issued Elijah's death warrant. Elijah responded to the death threat by running away in fear.

Read 1 Kings 19:5-8.



It is difficult to believe that after the events of Mount Carmel, Elijah would respond to the threat against him by running away in fear, but this is what we see. Like we often do, Elijah forgot the truth of God's power and responded to threatening circumstances by creating distance between himself and the threat. Elijah was a human being like us (Jas. 5:17a), which means he experienced the same temptations and struggles that we face, including spiritual discouragement and despair.



- **What brings you the most discouragement? In what ways do you identify with Elijah's struggle?**

God's first response to Elijah wasn't rebuke. It was "eat" (v. 5). The Lord fed him with a raven and then with a widow, and here He used an angel. A cake and a jar of water were provided for him. Twice he was strengthened by this miraculous provision of food and was refreshed by sleep (vv. 5-7). These provisions strengthened him to make a journey forty days and forty nights to Horeb (v. 8). (This event reminds us of another mediator in the wilderness, one who went forty days and forty nights without food: Jesus. (Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13). Soon God would speak to Elijah and give him a vision for the future (v. 9). But first he fed him.

- **Share about a difficult time in your life when God was faithful in ministering to you.**
- **How are you tempted to forget about God's power and allow your circumstances to overwhelm you?**

Read 1 Kings 19:15-18.



After bread from an angel and the quiet voice of God on the mountain, Elijah was still not renewed and ready to re-engage in his prophetic ministry (1 Kings 19:5-14). In verse 18, God told Elijah that he wasn't the only true believer left in Israel. God had a remnant.

Ultimately, God preserved His people until the coming of the ultimate remnant, Jesus, appeared. Jesus was the slain remnant, who was put into the ground, lying there silently, only to rise again triumphantly. Now, Jesus has a people, not just from Israel but also from the nations, who have been saved by grace. God's saving grace was a word of assurance to Elijah, and it should be a wonderful word of assurance to us as well. When discouraged, look away from yourself, and look to Jesus.



COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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1 Kings 19

5-8. What caused Elijah to despair? First, Elijah lost perspective. He lost sight of the fact that a short-term victory doesn't mean the war is over.

Second, Elijah lost his commitment to follow God's Word. Elijah didn't allow God's word to direct his path. In chapters 17-18, the writer records how "the word of the LORD came to Elijah," then "he went" (1 Kings 17:2, 5, 8, 10, 18:1-2). But now, there is no word from the Lord, and Elijah seemingly departs on his own. The word of the Lord doesn't appear again until verse 9.

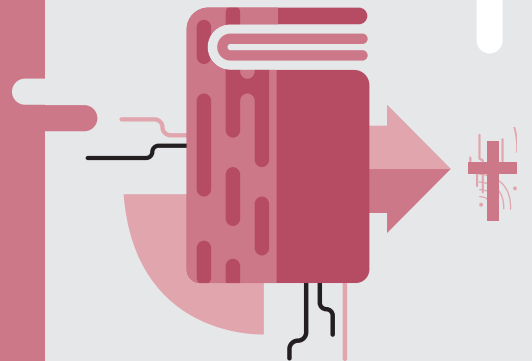
Third, Elijah lost his vision of the greatness of God. Previously, he was fearless before Ahab and the false prophets, but now we read that he grew "afraid" (v. 3). Because he grew afraid and lost his vision of God, he lost his fight.

Finally, Elijah lost his desire to live (v. 4). We might wonder how this could be, but a few answers seem clear. Elijah was physically and emotionally drained. He was also disappointed. He probably expected a revival to occur after the events at Mount Carmel, but that didn't happen. He was also isolated, which is never healthy or wise. The text goes on to show that Elijah also believed half-truths, which led to self-pity, self-righteousness, and self-importance. All of these factors together led Elijah to pray, "I have had enough! LORD, take my life." (v. 4).

15-18. God's mercy was demonstrated here in that He kept dealing with Elijah and gave him a new vision for the future. His assignment was to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha (vv. 15-17). The ultimate victory over Baal worship would not be solved by the victory at Carmel, instead it would come through a slow process that would extend beyond Elijah's life. The defeat of Baal would not happen by Elijah alone, nor would it happen in his lifetime. Elijah's job involved more than fighting well in the present; it also involved preparing others for the future. We will read of Elijah's instructions being lived out in chapters to come (2 Kings 8:7-15; 9-10).

(p. 17, DDG) Christ Connection

Elijah was a prophet whom God used to perform amazing miracles, yet he still faced persecution and opposition from those who rejected God. His example points forward to Jesus, the greatest prophet, who endured opposition and rejection for delivering God's words of life.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



How does the showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal mirror our situation in today's culture?

Elijah confronted the false prophets, not to show that he was superior, but so they would know God is the one true God who could turn their hearts to Him. What does this tell us our motivation should be today when we stand for truth?

Heart



What can we learn from Elijah's own period of fear and hopelessness?

What are some biblical and healthy ways we can respond to moments of fear?

Hands



Part of Elijah's disappointment came from the fact that the events at Mount Carmel didn't have quite the impact he imagined they would. Have you ever experienced something similar? In light of Elijah's story here, how should you respond to similar moments?

How can you use your difficult times to minister to others this week?

Main Point:
**Even in our moments
of fear and stress,
God is with us.**



Head

When we first read the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, often our initial response is to wonder why the Israelites were shallow enough to have fallen so easily into the worship of Baal, a pagan god. Not only that, but we assume that we would never fall into a trap like that—after all, we are modern Christians who are more educated and better informed than people who lived thousands of years ago. However, as we continue in this story, we begin to see that people today are not that different from people then, especially when it comes to humanity not being loyal to God. Our disloyalty, too, comes in the form of us accepting a pluralistic view of religious beliefs, which is the belief that says, “All religions are equally true.” Elijah dealt with a similar problem when the Israelites wavered in their loyalty and faith in Yahweh as the true God.



Heart

Everyone faces the disappointing sting of failure in one way or another. We do not need to beat ourselves up for our moments of despair, nor do we need to deny them. Yet we cannot stay in those moments forever. In this passage, God ministered to Elijah in his despair for over a month while the prophet made his way to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai). Yet, as the angel noted, there was more to come. Elijah still had a good purpose to fulfill in this world. The Lord wanted to use Elijah, which should encourage us and strengthen our faith that God would want to use us as well.



Hands

Even in our dark and difficult times, God still works through us to influence our world for His purposes and Kingdom. This is why we need to resist the temptation to think that our lives do not truly matter. Like Elijah, we can be tempted while exhausted and in pain to become narrow-minded and blind to God’s mission for mankind. We might say things like, “If these big things (like fire from heaven) didn’t change the hearts of men, then I give up! Nothing will work.” Yet, God has shown us through the obedient suffering of Jesus Christ and His redeeming resurrection, there is hope no matter how grim our current situation may be.