

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings

Lesson 11: Elijah on Mount Carmel -- 1 Kings 18:1-46

Three years. No rain. No dew. The land of Israel had become a husk of itself, cracked and brown, the granaries empty, the cisterns dry. And in the middle of all of it, Ahab, the king, was walking through his territory not in repentance but in desperation, looking for grass to keep his horses and mules alive (18:5). Not his people, his animals. The man who had sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord (21:25) was worried about his livestock while seven thousand faithful souls quietly kept the faith and a famine carved the hills into dust. You could not invent a more vivid portrait of what idolatry does to a nation's leaders: it makes small men of them.

And then there is Elijah. He steps back into the story like a man who has been somewhere important and is not in a hurry about any of this. God says to him, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth' (18:1). That is all God says, and that is all Elijah needs. He does not draw up a survival strategy. He does not negotiate the terms. He finds Obadiah, a genuinely godly man running a wicked king's household with extraordinary courage, and sends him ahead with a simple message: 'Go, tell your lord, Elijah is here' (18:8). There is no tremble in those words. There is only the calm of a man who knows whose servant he is and whose word he carries.

What follows on the summit of Mount Carmel is one of the most dramatic scenes in the entire Bible. Eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and Asherah against one prophet of the Lord. All of Israel watching. Two altars. Two bulls. Two stacks of wood. And the terms are simple enough for any child to understand: the God who answers by fire, He is God. Baal's prophets cry, dance, and cut themselves from morning to noon. The text is almost comic in its relentlessness: 'There was no voice. No one answered. No one paid attention' (18:29). And then Elijah steps forward, soaks his altar with water, and prays a confident prayer that trusts God completely in the face of impossible odds. It is not recklessness. It is faith.

The fire falls. The people fall. The rain comes. And before the chapter is done, Elijah has outrun Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel, carried along by the hand of the Lord (18:46). This is a chapter about the living God proving Himself Lord over nature, over the prophets of the nations, over the wavering heart of His own people, and over the drought He had sent and the rain He alone could restore. It is also a chapter about you and every moment you have tried to keep one foot in the world's camp and one foot in God's, limping between two opinions. God's word to you through Mount Carmel is the same as His word to Israel: choose. There is only one God, and He has not changed.

Group Discussion: Elijah's challenge to Israel was 'How long will you go limping between two opinions?' (18:21). What do you think it looks like in a modern believer's life to limp between two opinions, and why do you think people do it rather than simply leaving God entirely?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about a specific area of your life where you have been trying to maintain loyalty to both God and something that competes with Him for your whole heart. What has the cost of that divided loyalty been, and what would it look like to settle it this week?

Read 1 Kings 18:1–46

Study Questions

1. Read 1 Kings 18:1–6. After three years of drought, Ahab's concern is for his horses and mules rather than the spiritual condition of his people. What does Ahab's response to the famine reveal about what idolatry does to a leader's perception of what actually matters?
2. Obadiah feared the Lord greatly and hid a hundred prophets in caves at great personal risk (18:3–4), yet he served as the head of a wicked king's household. Think about the context you occupy every day: a workplace, a neighborhood, a family, where the surrounding culture does not share your faith. What does Obadiah's example teach you about being genuinely faithful in a hostile environment, and where does his example most challenge you personally?
3. Read 1 Kings 18:17–21. Ahab calls Elijah the 'troubler of Israel,' but Elijah immediately redirects the charge: the real troublemakers are those who abandoned the Lord's commandments to follow Baal. Then Elijah poses his question to all of Israel: 'How long will you go limping between two opinions?' (18:21). What does 'limping between two opinions' mean in its context, and why did the people say nothing in response?
4. Elijah's question hit the people in the silence that follows when a truth is so accurate it cannot be answered. Is there a place in your own walk where the silence of your behavior answers the same question Elijah asked? Where are you most tempted to keep one foot in devotion to God and one foot in a competing loyalty, and what has that cost you spiritually?

5. Read 1 Kings 18:22–29. The 850 prophets of Baal cried aloud, danced, and cut themselves from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice with no response. What does the utter silence of Baal reveal about the nature of false gods, and why does the text dwell so long and in such detail on the failure of Baal's prophets before Elijah acts?
6. The prophets of Baal gave everything they had to a god who could not hear them. It is easy to see the tragedy from the outside. But think about the exhausting investments people around you make in things that cannot ultimately deliver: status, achievement, relationships made into gods, pleasure as a purpose. Where have you personally invested yourself in something that eventually answered with silence, and what did that teach you about what actually satisfies?
7. Read 1 Kings 18:30–39. Elijah repairs the broken altar of the Lord, uses twelve stones to represent all Israel, drenches the sacrifice and the wood three times, and then prays a remarkably brief and confident prayer. What is Elijah asking God to accomplish in his prayer (18:36–37), and what does his thorough preparation and the soaking of the altar with water communicate about the kind of faith he was exercising?
8. Elijah's prayer was saturated with knowledge of who God is: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel' (18:36). It was specific about what he needed and clear about why he needed it. How would you honestly describe the quality of your own prayer life right now? Is it marked by that same confident, specific, God-knowing quality, or has it drifted toward something vague and routine, and what would it take to recover its fire?
9. Read 1 Kings 18:36–40, then 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. The fire that fell on Carmel was a miraculous act of God authenticating His prophet and His word against the claims of Baal in a moment of national idolatry. What was the theological purpose of this

miracle in its own historical moment? And since the New Testament declares that prophecy, signs, and miraculous gifts have ceased now that the completed word of God has been given, what does Carmel's fire mean for us today, and where does God-authenticated truth now reside for those who want to know the living God?

10. Looking back across all of 1 Kings 18, from Obadiah's quiet courage to Elijah's drenched altar to the people's cry 'The Lord, He is God,' name one specific thing this chapter has settled in you about your own allegiance to God, and describe one concrete step you will take this week to live with less limp and more wholehearted devotion.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 13:1–5, where God warns that miracles done in support of false gods do not authenticate those gods, establishing that authentication of the true God is the point of genuine signs; James 5:16–18, where Elijah's prayer for rain is held up as an example of the prayer of a righteous person, powerful and effective; Hebrews 1:1–2, where God's settled manner of speaking through His Son and the completed word is contrasted with the many partial ways He spoke before; 2 Timothy 3:16–17, where the completed Scriptures are declared sufficient to make the believer complete and equipped for every good work; Romans 1:16, where the gospel itself is the power of God for salvation, requiring no new miraculous sign for its authentication

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