

#15 - Prophets of Baal - 1 Kings 18

Engage:

- As we continue our journey through the Bible following the theme of God's Redemptive Story, we continue to see God involved in the lives of people. Those who follow His lead experience both good and bad times, but are blessed. David was an example of a good king, yet there were those who rejected His lead. Ahab was an example of a bad king.

This lesson is about a period of time in the history of Israel when most of the kings of Israel and Judah were wicked. Even when people rejected God, God was still involved in their lives. For one reason, He had promised that a king would come from the line of David who would be the Messiah. This promise was kept when Jesus was born.

- The story for this lesson is a powerful account of God's desire to prove to humankind that He is in control and that when anyone opens their eyes, His presence will be seen. God used Elijah as His spokesman to tell the wicked king of Israel Ahab (See 1Kings 16:29-33) that there was going to be a severe drought. Elijah said that it was not going to rain, except when he said it would (1 Kings 17:1). After conveying this message, the Lord told Elijah to leave and go where He would show him to live (away from the presence of Ahab who then sought to find him - 1 Kings 18:10). This proved to be a difficult time in the life of Elijah. God had to provide for Elijah in a special way during this time. (1 Kings 17:2-24). As the drought intensifies, God told Elijah to return to king Ahab to present what might be called the "challenge of the gods" at Mount Carmel.

Thoughts about the story:

- 1 Kings 18:1-16 – Elijah meets Obadiah

The Lord directed Elijah to go to king Ahab. At the same time Ahab and the man in charge of his palace, Obadiah, were scouting for places to find water and grass for the king's horses and mules.

Obadiah was a man who worshiped God. He was not the same Obadiah who wrote the Old Testament book of his name. Even though he served the wicked king Ahab, he secretly concealed and provided food and water for 100 prophets of God (50 in one cave and 50 in another cave). If queen Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had found these men, she would have had them killed (1 Kings 18:4, 13).

Elijah and Obadiah met during this expedition. Obadiah recognized Elijah and bowed before him. Elijah told Obadiah to tell Ahab that he was "here." Obadiah was afraid to do this. He was afraid that Elijah would not be able to be found after he told Ahab and then Ahab would have him killed. Elijah assured Obadiah that he would see Elijah that day. Obadiah went to Ahab and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Note: Elijah was not afraid to meet Ahab, nor tell him the truth. This is a demonstration of his faithfulness.

- 1 Kings 18:17-46 – Elijah meets Ahab and the prophets of Baal

When they met, Ahab called Elijah a "troubler of Israel." Elijah countered by saying that it was really Ahab and his father's family who had brought trouble to Israel because they followed the worship of Baal.

Note: “The wicked always blame the believers for the trouble in the world; they never think to blame their own sins” (Wiersbe).

Elijah challenged Ahab to bring people from all over Israel to Mount Carmel, including 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel’s table to witness a challenge between the gods of Baal and Yahweh. The challenge was simple and profound: “If the LORD is God, follow him, but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). In other words, follow the god who is real, not an imposter.

Elijah’s proposal to determine whose god was real was simple. The prophets of Baal and Elijah would each offer a sacrifice to God without setting fire to it. The prophets of Baal would call on their god and Elijah would call on the LORD (Yahweh). The one who answers with fire would be God! Elijah even gave the prophets of Baal the opportunity to go first and to choose which bull they would sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal began in the morning, but by noon, nothing had happened. Elijah mocked them by telling them to “shout louder” since their god may be “deep in thought, or busy, or traveling”. In desperation, the prophets of Baal cut themselves with swords and spears, but to no avail. They did this until the time for the evening sacrifice (3 pm).

Then it was Elijah’s turn. He called the people to come to him. He repaired the the altar of the LORD. He used 12 stones (each represent one of the tribes of Israel) to build an altar. After building the altar, he had four large jars of water poured on the offering. He had this repeated a second time, and then a third time. He made sure that no one could say that what happened was not real.

Then Elijah prayed a simple and direct prayer to the LORD that He might demonstrate that He is God. (Note: Why do heathens even bother to pray to a god they have made with their hands - Psalm 115:2-8). God responded. Fire fell from heaven. It consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the water and the soil. (Note: “Soil” - This must refer to the soil that was used in building the altar. It is hard to understand what actually happened with the soil. The burning of the wood, stones and water is much easier to understand.)

The people who witnessed this display of God’s presence fell to the ground and cried, “The LORD - he is God!”

God had won, but there was more to do.

- Elijah commanded the people to seize the prophets of Baal and kill them.
- Elijah told Ahab that there was going to be a heavy rain. Note: One of the powers that was attributed to Baal was that he was a rain god. Not only was Baal not able to send fire, but he was also not able to send rain.
- Elijah then went and prayed until rain came. He had his servant check 7 times before the servant saw a cloud in the distance.
- Elijah told the servant to tell Ahab to get in his chariot and go to Jezreel.
- Elijah, with God’s power, ran faster than Ahab could travel in his chariot as they both went to Jezreel.

Extras:

- Elijah provides a lesson in the importance of spending time in private with God. Our private life prepares us for our public life (remember the Spiritual Root System hand-out from Dean Trune

in the 1st Spiritual Disciplines lesson). “Unless we are willing to go through such disciplines as the dry brook, the depleted barrel, and the dead boy, we will never have the victories of Mt. Carmel. ‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength’” - Isaiah 40:31 (Wiersbe).

- James 5:17-18 identifies Elijah as one whose life modeled prayer, “not because he was so *remarkable* but because he was so *ordinary*! Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed The remarkable thing about Elijah’s prayer life was how often he prayed inconvenient prayers. He prayed for a drought—knowing that if God answered his prayer, the brook Cherith would dry up as well! He prayed for fire from heaven—knowing it would leave him a ‘marked man’ in the eyes of Israel’s king and queen. You could summarize his prayer life this way: ‘God, do something great—and I’ll be happy to cooperate, even if it gets inconvenient!’” *DW*, April 1982