



Sunday School Lesson for November 5, 2006

Released on November 1, 2006

"Elijah Triumphs with God"

Printed Text: 1 Kings 18:20–24, 30–35, 38, 39

Background Scripture: 1 Kings 18:20-39

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:9-13

1 Kings 18:20–24, 30–35, 38, 39

20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:

24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

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30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy 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 measures of seed.

33 And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.

34 And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time.

35 And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

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38 Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, 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 they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.

Introduction

The Power of One

During the summer of 2004, Mike Krzyzewski, head coach of the men's basketball team at Duke University, was approached about becoming head coach of the National Basketball Association's Los Angeles Lakers. "Coach K," as he is known, had gained a reputation as one of the premier coaches in college basketball. The high salary and prestige that accompanied coaching a team like the Lakers were tempting.

In the midst of his deliberations, Krzyzewski received an email that proved to be the pivotal influence in his decision. Andrew Humphries, a junior at Duke, sent an impassioned message for Coach K to stay. The email brought tears to the eyes of Krzyzewski; he rejected the Lakers' offer and chose to remain at Duke.

Andrew Humphries was just one person—yet he had the power to persuade! The prophet Elijah also was just one man. His voice seemed like a whisper in Israel when compared with the powerful, government-backed influence of Baal worship. Yet when just one person chooses to stand firm on behalf of the one true God, the results can be one of a kind! Coach K could well have made a different decision even after Humphries' email. Would the people on Mount Carmel dare to have chosen Baal after seeing the power of God before their eyes?

Lesson Background

The Prophet Elijah was a rugged individualist who served as a foretype for John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 3:1-4; 17:10-13). We first read of him in 1 Kings 17:1. God revealed to him that there would be no dew or rain in Israel until the Lord declared otherwise. The king of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahab, blamed Elijah for the famine that resulted from the drought. The prophet placed the blame on Ahab and his household for having forsaken the commandments of the Lord and for following Baalim (the Baal gods). He challenged the king to send the false prophets to Mount Carmel for a contest (18:1, 17-19).

Elijah had his emotional ups and downs. In this lesson we see him at his best, bravely meeting Satan's emissaries and proving them wrong. In 1 Kings 19:1-18 we see him at his worst, afraid, exhausted, and despairing after he was threatened by Queen Jezebel.

It is interesting to learn that Elijah thought he was God's only prophet in Israel, but he was told that there were seven thousand people who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 18:22; 19:18). God always has His faithful remnant to carry on His work.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Give the significant details of the account of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.
- 2.** Tell why this confrontation was such a crucial event in the history of God's people.
- 3.** Write a prayer that commits him or her to take a stand for God's truth in a situation where doing so will go against an ungodly viewpoint.

How to Say It

AHAB. Ay-hab.

ASHERAH. Uh-*she*-ruh.

ELIJAH. Ee-*lye*-juh.

JEZEBEL. Jez-uh-bel.

[KRZYZEWSKI](#). Sha-*shef*-ski.

People Addressed (1 Kings 18:20–24)

1. Why did King Ahab gather his prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20)?

King Ahab accepted Elijah's challenge to send his false prophets to Mount Carmel—at least, he sent the 450 prophets of Baal. We see no mention of the 400 prophets of Asherah who were fed from Jezebel's table following a reference to them in verse 19 ("prophets of the groves"). Ahab also ordered others from Israel, probably elders, to go to Mount Carmel to represent the nation.

Mount Carmel is located at the end of a mountain range that runs toward the Great (Mediterranean) Sea. Followers of Baal believed Carmel was his dwelling place. The Carmel range formed the border between Israel and Phoenicia to the north. A plateau halfway up the mountain would have provided a place for a large audience to gather and view the spectacle that was about to unfold.

2. What did Elijah ask the people when he arrived (v. 21)?

Carmel Elijah appeared before the crowd and asked them how long they planned to waver between two opinions. He wanted them to decide whether they would give their allegiance to the Lord (Yahweh) or to Baal. He clearly implied that they could not claim they were able to serve both.

Elijah thus is describing the spiritual unsteadiness of the people in the crowd that day. The alternative to such hobbling will be a confident, steady walk with the Lord, which they do not possess.

The issue facing the people on this occasion is remarkably simple. Two options confront them: the way of *the Lord* and the way of *Baal*. In today's pluralistic religious climate, Elijah's statement is still timely. We may choose a narrow road to salvation or a wide road to destruction (Matthew 7:13, 14).

The fact that they remained silent and would not respond may indicate that they were afraid to state their preference until they were sure they could come down on the right side of the issue. The outcome of the contest about to take place would determine that.

3. Did Elijah feel lonely when he said "...even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord" (v. 22)?

Elijah observes that he is the only one of the Lord's prophets left. Yet we know from an earlier statement in 1 Kings 18:4 that Obadiah, one of Ahab's officials, has hidden 100 prophets of the Lord from Jezebel's murderous fury. In addition there are prophets such as Micaiah (22:8) and various unnamed men who are part of the group known as the "sons of the prophets" (20:35). Elijah probably means that he is the only one of the Lord's prophets who is present for this confrontation.

There are times when the man of God or woman of God has to walk without visible support from others of like mind and heart. Elijah realized that he had to lean solely on the Lord to carry him through the drama that was about to unfold. He had to believe that this was all that was needed.

Elijah's emphasis on the contrast between 1 and 450 highlights a key principle: truth is not determined by the numbers who embrace a certain position. Truth is truth, no matter how many or how few hold to it at any given time.

4. What did Elijah ask the prophets of Baal to do (vs. 23,24)?

Elijah called for two bulls. He told the prophets of Baal to choose one of them for themselves. The rules of the contest are simple. Each side is to prepare a bull in the same manner: *cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood*. Then each side is to call on the name of its deity. *The God* who responds *by fire* will prove himself to be the true *God*.

In verse 24 Elijah urged the pagans to call on the name of their gods. He promised to call on the name of his God, but this too was delayed until later (vs. 36,37). The object of these pleas or prayers was to convince either Baal or Elijah's God to respond by consuming the respective sacrifices with fire. The people heard the proposal and agreed to it. They obviously were curious to see what would happen. Some may have thought that fire would fall on both sacrifices, while others may have thought it would fall on one or the other but not on both.

In verses 25-29 we learn what happened when the prophets of Baal called on their god. From morning until noontime, they cried out for Baal to hear them. There was no response. In their frenzy they began to leap onto their altar. At this point, Elijah began to mock them, saying that perhaps Baal was talking, or busy, or traveling, or even sleeping and needed to be awakened.

The prophets of Baal shrieked, cut themselves with knives (swords) and lancets (spears) until their blood flowed, and carried on their ranting and raving until the time of the regular sacrifice. "Evening" (v. 29), which is in italics, meaning it is not in the Hebrew text, can be confusing. The regular time for the Israelites' "evening" sacrifice was 3:00 P.M. The prophets probably stopped at that time because they were exhausted, weakened from loss of blood, and in despair because their god had not responded.

The threefold emphasis at the conclusion of verse 29 provides a solemn closure to the failure of Baal's prophets: "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." The stage is now set for a dramatic display of divine power.

Preparation Accomplished (1 Kings 18:30–35)

5. What did Elijah repair when it was time for him to act (v. 30)?

Now it was Elijah's time to act. He summoned the people to come close to him, and they did. While nothing is said specifically about the altar used by the prophets of Baal, it is noted that Elijah repaired *the altar of the Lord*, which was *broken down*. No doubt this altar had been a victim of the apathy and neglect of the people toward the worship of the true God.

6. What extensive preparation did Elijah make for his sacrifice (vs. 31-35)?

The fact that Elijah selected twelve stones to use in repairing the altar of the Lord was significant. He was using this as a visual reminder that God had selected the twelve tribes of Israel to receive His name. The name of the false god Baal had been allowed to predominate under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, and Israel's spiritual decline had accelerated. Elijah wanted to turn things around and get his nation back on track.

Elijah put the stones into place and dug a trench around the altar deep and wide enough to contain two measures of seed. This would equal about half a bushel (or about 13 quarts). However, the trench was not intended to hold seeds but water.

Elijah now did what the prophets of Baal had already done with their altar. He placed wood on it to be used as fuel. He cut the bull into parts and laid them on the altar as his sacrifice to God (v. 33). He then instructed men to fill four barrels (probably large earthen jars) with water and pour it over the animal parts and the wood.

The water may be available from the streams that flow at higher elevations even in dry seasons, such as that of Mount Carmel, despite the severe drought that is now in its fourth year (Luke 4:25; James 5:17).

By having the bull parts and the wood saturated with water, Elijah eliminated any thought that he could secretly light a fire that would consume the sacrifice. The drama was heightened when he ordered the same amount of water to be poured out on the altar two more times. This was enough not only to saturate the contents of the altar but also to run down over it and fill up the trench dug around it.

The Lord's work more often than not is carried out quietly behind the scenes, eliciting little notice from the world at large. There are times, however, when some spectacular event will be effective in drawing people to the Lord. The message of Christ is usually carried forth in routine programs carried on by churches, schools, publishers, and other organizations; but there should be room for massive evangelistic campaigns, dedication ceremonies, and rallies geared toward special interests.

We can be sure that Elijah now had the full attention of the people gathered at Mount Carmel. We might say today that he was pushing the envelope by dousing the altar as thoroughly as he did. He certainly would have to deliver unusual results in order to be credible.

7. What was the significance of Elijah's prayer in verses 36,37 (not in lesson text, extra credit)?

In verses 36,37 we find the record of what happened after the sacrifice was prepared. It was probably in the late afternoon that Elijah came near the altar and began to pray. We do not know whether he prayed quietly or loudly enough for the congregation to hear him.

Elijah identified Yahweh as the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). He further identified Him as the God of the nation of Israel. He portrayed himself as God's servant and said that he had done all things that day according to God's word.

Elijah emphatically called on God to hear him and thus prove to the people assembled there that He was their only true God. He believed the Lord was seeking to turn the wayward hearts of the Israelites back to Himself again. Elijah was not trying to enhance his own personal reputation. He was calling on Yahweh to vindicate His holy name before the people.

Prayer Answered (1 Kings 18:38, 39)

8. What did God do to Elijah's sacrifice to prove His existence and power (v. 38)?

In a spectacular display of unmistakably divine power, the fire of the Lord consumes everything that is part of the preparation for the sacrifice. Even the *water in the trench is licked up* by the fire.

If this kind of thing were to happen today, no doubt there would be critics who would cynically maintain that it was an illusion. They would attempt to find natural, scientific explanations to account for the phenomenon.

However, our text obviously depicts a supernatural event that defies scientific explanation. The timing and the localization were too precise to be a coincidence of any type or the manifestation of some natural phenomenon. We must count this as a miracle performed by the Lord as a means of motivating people to place their faith in Him.

9. How did the people react to this dramatic event (v. 39)?

All the people, who were silent earlier when confronted by Elijah (v. 21), do not hesitate to express their reaction after what they witness.

The reaction of the people to this unusual occurrence was immediate. As soon as they saw it, they fell on their faces to the ground. They took up a chant expressing their conclusion—"The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

When Elijah had first come to the gathering at Mount Carmel, he had challenged the people to make a choice between Yahweh and Baal (v. 21). The people had now made their choice. The use of the article "the" before "God" in verse 39 may point to the fact that they saw Yahweh not just as a god, or as another god, but as the only one true God.

The aftermath of the contest on Mount Carmel includes the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. That is in accordance with the Law of Moses concerning false prophets (Deuteronomy 18:20). Also come the long-awaited rains. The drought has ended, and—more importantly—the Lord, His prophet, and His Word have been vindicated.

CONCLUSION

Demonstrating Power Today

Perhaps after reading an account such as that of Elijah we may wonder, "Why don't we see demonstrations of God's power such as this today? If we could offer the kind of evidence that Elijah did on Mount Carmel, think of the impact it would have on our culture! Does God no longer provide these demonstrations, or do we as His people lack faith?"

We should remember that as Christians we bear witness to the greatest of all demonstrations of God's power: the resurrection of Jesus His Son from the dead. That always has been the essence of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Interestingly, when the New Testament instructs Christians on how to live in light of that event, it points to the quiet, often inconspicuous deeds of service done in the name of Christ. The metaphors of salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16) are hardly noisy or flamboyant in how they function. But no one can question their effectiveness or their necessity.

Elijah's surroundings demanded the kind of highly visible, dramatic manifestation of power that God wrought at Mount Carmel. We see similar demonstrations during other critical periods in biblical history (the plagues in Egypt and the miracles of Jesus, for example). But a primary challenge issued to New Testament believers today is that of a consistently holy lifestyle. Peter challenged the Christians of his time to live holy lives among unbelievers that "whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12).

PRAYER

Father, may we have the courage to stand for You in our time as Elijah did in his. When we feel intimidated by the strength or loudness of the opposition, help us to be unmoved. Help us to remain faithful and consistent in our testimony. May we thereby give no one cause to question our devotion to Your Son, Jesus. In His name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God will give us the courage we need for any opposition we face.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEKS LESSON

Next week we will explore how a young king named Josiah brought reform to a chaotic kingdom. Study Background Scripture **2 Kings 22, 23 "Josiah Brings Reform"**

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