

# 1 Kings 18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for being here this morning in your presence.

And we just ask that you would give us a stillness in our hearts and give us an understanding of the message that you want to share with us today.

That we might be built up in the faith. Lord, we want to hear your voice over and above the voice of the preacher here this morning.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I want to draw a little picture for you of this man Elijah before we come to the body of 1 Kings 18.

Where Elijah is standing before the king called Ahab, as we said to the children. Elijah not only features in the Old Testament, but he also features in the New.

[ 1 : 05 ] And the fact was brought home to me more forcefully than ever before on my first visit to Jordan a number of years ago. We were standing there on the top of Mount Nebo.

That's where Moses looked into the promised land. And he saw this land of promise that he would never himself experience. We saw into the promised land, up the Jordan Valley, down to the Negev, across to Jerusalem, Mount of Olives, 28 miles away.

About 15 miles away down in the Jordan Valley is the city of Jericho. And just a little bit closer than that is Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John the Baptist was baptizing.

And where he baptized Jesus. And while we were traveling from Mount Nebo to the baptismal site, we stopped briefly. And the guide said to us, the Jordanian guide said to us, here is the hill of Elijah. The penny dropped for me. The penny dropped at that very moment. I understand how John the Baptist and Elijah were linked together in the New Testament.

[ 2 : 19 ] John had come to witness to God in the very same place that Elijah was taken from this earth and into heaven in the chariots of fire. In Matthew chapter 17, we find Elijah with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus responded to this question from the disciples.

Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? And he answered, that's Jesus answered, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come.

And they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Saying Elijah had already come was a reference to the Baptist, who had already been put to death.

We can read of that in Matthew chapter 14. As Jesus himself soon would be. John's death came about. And you probably know the story about when Herod's stepdaughter asked for John's head as a birthday present.

It happened called Macarius, not that far away from Mount Nebo in Jordan. It's called the Castle of the Gallows or Sword. Men like Elijah, men like John, and women too, who stand up in the faith, can find themselves under threat from evil people.

[ 3 : 48 ] And we find that in our reading from 1 Kings today. Nevertheless, Elijah stood up to King Ahab and the people of Israel.

Ahab sent all the people to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, How long will you go on limping between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow him. But of Baal, then follow him. And the people did not answer him a word. So Elijah's ministry lasted for around 25 years.

From 870 to 845 BC. And the task that he was given at this time was to tackle this problem in the nation of Israel.

The problem of Baal worship. Or Baal worship. Elijah's ministry. That had been introduced to the nation by Ahab. Or particularly by Ahab's wife, Jezebel.

[ 4 : 51 ] Elijah really was a remarkable man. After his first encounter with Ahab, he warned the king that there would be no rain for many years.

And God told Elijah, as we shared in the story with the boys and girls, to go to the brook Kareth, where he was fed by the ravens. The brook dried up and he was told to go to Sarapheth, where the Lord prepared a widow's heart to feed Elijah.

Even although she was poverty-stricken herself. Miraculously, the flour, the meal, and the oil never ran out.

There was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of oil was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah. Later on, the son dies and the prophet prays to God and the son is brought to life again. And the woman said to Elijah, Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is in your mouth.

[ 6 : 00 ] So that confirms to us what Elijah was. A man of God. And all of this was divinely ordained, showing us that it was the Lord who controls the climate, who controls life, who controls death.

For he and he alone is God. This would become clear in the later challenges as well. So the story we find in chapter 18 is before us.

Now we hear the term nowadays that rain stopped play. But here, the lack of rain was causing huge devastation.

In Samaria, the famine was so severe that King Ahab, who had been king for a few years, sent for his servant Obadiah. He was a palace overseer.

And verses 3 and 4 tells us of the caliber of this man. Obadiah was a devout believer of the Lord. The Lord, to this very day, has people, his own people, in places of power, throughout the nations of the world, to influence leaders, to do what is right.

[ 7 : 23 ] Why do you think a man like Mike Pence is second in command in that great nation across the Atlantic of America? He's been given the role of vice president in the United States.

And that is not without reason. Jacob Rees-Mogg, who's a Christian, maybe from a different denomination to what we are, has been leader of the House of Commons.

Again, this is a role given to him by God for a purpose. Do the media give these people good press? Absolutely not.

So here we have Obadiah. He came to meet King Ahab at his request. And all of this happened at a very, very dark period in the history of Israel.

In 1 Kings 16, we're told that Ahab had done more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any who had gone before him. That's how bad it was.

[ 8 : 31 ] He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made a national pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

This guy was bad. But the Bible also records for us that all the kings of Israel were seen as being bad kings. But here was Ahab.

He was looking after himself. He was afraid for his property. He was afraid for his animals. He was concerned for his livestock due to the famine. So he got both himself and Obadiah out there to look for food and water for their animals.

Now this, what was going to happen was not going to be a coincidence. It was a God incidence. For as Obadiah was on his mission, who did he meet but the prophet Elijah, who recognized him immediately.

[ 9 : 54 ] Bowing before him, Obadiah said, is it really you, my lord Elijah? Is it really you? Yes, he replied. Go tell your master Elijah is here.

Now, I can't believe for a moment that there was nothing more said than that. I don't think Elijah would be quite that abrupt. Surely they would have passed the time of day, first of all. But anyway, what we have here is that he said, yes, I'm Elijah.

Go and tell your master Elijah is here. Now, of course, Obadiah, the king's servant, became fearful for his own life and not without reason.

For in Ahab's eyes, Elijah was top of his wanted list. And if one of his men had seen him and let him escape, what hope was there for him?

So far, Elijah had managed to escape from Ahab. So Obadiah, he goes back to the king, goes back to King Ahab and tells him that Elijah wants to meet with him.

[10:59] And Ahab goes to look for him. Doesn't find him. And if he doesn't find him, Ahab is as good as dead. Ahab was ruthless.

We read that he was killing off the king's prophets in cahoots with his wife Jezebel, whom he should not have married in the first place because the Israelites should not have married pagan peoples.

God had forbidden marriage to people from the heathen nations. Jezebel didn't worship the God of Israel. She didn't worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

To follow Baal was to follow all different kinds of sensualities, sex orgies, human sacrifice, everything God warned Israel against.

And now the king of Israel, God's king in Israel, had embraced it all. And in the meantime, while all this was going on, Obadiah had saved a hundred of the prophets and fed them and watered them.

[12:07] Now you tell me to go to my master and say, Elijah's here.

Can you sense the fear in Obadiah's heart as Elijah tells him to go to King Ahab? He's just going to kill me. You see, when people and the nation of Israel at that time had turned their backs on God, when people turned their backs on God, nothing is ruled out.

People live as they please. Sex and all is deviant forms. Violence. Oh, they might be religious or something, but not for God. And we see that today.

We see how people will go and protect protect animals and it's right to care for animals. But then we find that they're quite happy with the abortion of a human baby.

Is that compatible? Government-sponsored transgenderism. People change sex. And it's too late when they want to change back.

[13:33] They can't do it. I would encourage you to check some of the Christian Institute publications that are coming out. Especially in those plans that the Scottish Government have for the next few months for legislating what is taught to our children and to our grandchildren.

Go to their website. Very important. And very important that we're in touch with our MPs, whoever they might be. Elijah understandably protested, but agreed to go to Ahab.

And surprisingly, on a human level, he accepts that he must go. And when he saw Elijah, I said to him, is that you, you troubler of Israel.

Elijah then asks Ahab to summon the people from all over Israel to meet him on Mount Carmel and bring 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to eat at Jezebel's table.

Now, we think of Mount Carmel as one mound of it. It's actually a 10-mile range going up to the sea, up to Haifa. 12 miles east is Nazareth.

[14:56] Nine miles southwest is Megiddo. And there in the center between Nazareth and Megiddo is the Valley of Megiddo or the Jezebel Valley as it's called.

And there the Kishon River runs through where the prophets of Baal would later be executed. So it's up here in that area that all of this happened up in the Galilee area.

But before that took place the summoned prophets gather and thousands of people with them gather on Mount Carmel and we read in verse 31 that he asked them, how long hold ye between two opinions?

If the Lord be God follow him but if Baal then follow him the people answered him not a word. It's possible.

that there is someone here who needs to answer for themselves that same question today. You're here today because something drew you.

[16:01] Maybe a friend invited you to come to church with him but you're not yet convinced that following Jesus is for you. you're maybe sitting on the fence and Elijah was there before the people.

He felt he was all alone and he challenged the people how long are you going to sit on the fence? But when you're sitting on the fence you haven't made a decision. If God is God follow him.

If Baal is God follow him. Make up your minds. For someone here today it could be make up your mind time.

I've been following Jesus for more than half my years. Over 33 years and the only regret I have the only regret I have is that I wasn't able to follow him sooner.

Elijah here all alone on Mount Carmel all these people who there were those who were undecided and there were those who were definitely against God and he's convinced that he's the only one left the only prophet who followed God.

[17:23] I'm the only one of God's prophets left he says in verse 22 and yet he's willing to stand there in front of all these people people I mean he could have got rid of them in no time but he's got God's strength and God is protecting him.

These prophets of Baal had been taking people up the wrong pathway away from God and all the people who had gathered there would have been thousands there were really in a quantity as to what they believe.

I'm not sure that I could have done what Elijah had done on that day.

I would certainly need a great confidence from God to do it. But here is Elijah among all of these people thousands of people and he gave them the instruction get two bulls build two altars and you call in your God Baal and I will call on God the true and living God and we'll see who'll give an answer.

The God who answers with fire will prove to be God and all the people agreed. It's a good plan. Let's do it. Verse 25 says choose your ox and prepare it.

[18:47] You go first. You're the majority. Then pray to your God but don't light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. So the people began to call on their God Baal.

They prayed all morning long, oh Baal answer us but nothing happened. Not so much as a whisper of breeze. Desperately they jumped and stomped on the altar they had made.

And it's as if Elijah's now poking fun at them. It's quite a humorous part of the Bible. Call out a little louder. He is God after all isn't he?

Maybe he's meditating somewhere away, somewhere or other. Maybe he's got himself involved with some project and can't listen to you just now.

Maybe he's taking a wee break. You don't suppose he's overslept, do you? He needs to be wakened up. they didn't know that the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

[19:57] The people got themselves in a friendly, praying louder and louder, shouting to the God, cutting themselves, wounding themselves in the process. But Baal was unable to give an answer to the people.

not a flicker of response from their God. Who are you calling on today to give you an answer to the issues in your life?

Who are you calling on? Who are you trusting on? Then Elijah here turns as if wanting to relieve them from her agony and he said enough is enough it's now my turn.

Let me get near the altar. As he watched Elijah had the old altar of the Lord that had been torn down by Jezebel repaired and rebuilt and when he had done that he arranged the wood and cut up a bull and placed it on the altar.

Verse 33 says Then he said to them fill four large jars with water and pour it in the offering and on the wood. Do it again he said and they did it again.

[21:13] Do it a third time he ordered and they did it a third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. Twelve barrels of water poured on the sacrifice and everything would have been sodden.

Could a fire light there? Now it's a people's turn to life turn to laugh at Elijah. Fire couldn't possibly be lit here.

But Elijah called again to his God. The one who is the almighty God. O Lord God of Abraham Isaac and Israel let it be known today that you are God in Israel and I am your servant and I have done all these things at your command.

Answer me O Lord answer me so that these people will know you. O Lord are God and that you are turning their hearts back again.

Then fire came down from heaven to the utter amazement of all who were gathered there. The bull, the wood, the stones, the soil were all burned up with the intensity of a volcano that we read about or maybe hear about today.

[ 22 : 36 ] And all the people fell before the Lord and cried, the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God, no more sitting on the fence.

They had come to realize that it was the God of Israel, the God who would be the father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was God and God alone.

Elijah was victorious over the prophets of Baal. This must have been one amazing spectacle.

One man, Elijah standing there alone, 450 prophets of Baal on the other side, and thousands of people standing waiting to see what would happen.

They were sitting on the fence. they didn't know if Elijah's God was God, or whether it was the God of Baal that they had been paying homage to was God.

[ 23 : 40 ] And the thing is, these people were people whose ancestors in the past had followed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Today, they must make up their minds. You see, they had wanted to follow the ways of the modern gods in their days.

They hadn't wanted to be tied to the past, the old fashioned ways. This new fangled idea of worshipping Baal was just the thing to do.

It was exciting. Fast forward to our own day. Fast forward to the day in which we live. Have we as a nation not largely rejected the God of our fathers?

Have we as a nation and as individuals not embraced the gods of the age? Materialism aided and abetted by the advertising industry and they're going full out over these next few days.

[ 24 : 51 ] What is it? Black Friday and Cyber Monday and Christmas all into one wanting to get a hold of your money. They want us to believe that we need to buy this.

We need to have this latest gadget. We can't live without it. And if you buy this gadget you'll be happy. You'll be satisfied.

But satisfaction doesn't always last long. When you buy a new car, a new phone, it's a toy for a few days and then it's just another item.

What about the image of people today? People want to project an image that they're so happy. They have the looks.

They have the latest fashion. They go to the right places on holiday. What about the real joy that is found in our relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and as Savior?

[ 26 : 13 ] the one who satisfies to the nth degree? Sex has become such an idol in the media today.

TV, press, magazines, across social media, everybody's doing it when everybody's not. Don't believe the media's lies.

it was designed by God for the procreation of children, the enjoyment of men and women committed together in marriage. That idea has been maligned and abused in the present day. money. And although far from new, a new thing, people still put their trust in money. We need money, of course we do.

But it's not the most valuable thing we have. No one can serve two masters, said Jesus in Matthew 6, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

[ 27 : 22 ] You cannot serve God in money. Who's my God today? Who's your God? But even although this is the case, just as in Elijah's day, there are people who have not fully rejected God.

They're as if it was afraid to stand on the Lord's side, for fear of what their friends, their families, their workmates may say. Is there any pressure on you not to profess as they did?

The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God. These people here took a public stand as a result of God opening their hearts, and so must we.

we cannot be a secret follower of Jesus forever. Jesus says, whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. And Romans 10 and 9 says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[ 28 : 52 ] The people here were no longer wavering between two opinions. They knew by the power of the sovereign God on that day who was God.

The Lord, he is God, follow him. Baal was left behind on that day. They witnessed the power of the living God before their very eyes.

No more altars to other gods. What about you here today? Do you have to destroy an altar? Are there altars you need to demolish in your life? Is there anything, anybody, who is keeping you from following the Lord Jesus?

You've sought happiness and fulfillment and all kinds of things, but it's only Jesus who will give fulfillment to your deepest needs.

[ 30 : 00 ] Come to me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This is Jesus. Amen, and may the Lord bless to us these thoughts from his holy word.

Let's pray again. Thank you.