

God is All-Powerful

IS THERE ANY POWER LIKE THE LORD'S POWER?

Focal Verses • 1 KINGS 18:20–21, 30–39

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ANALYZE the event on Mount Carmel when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, feel AMAZED at how powerful God can be if we remain on His side, and CHOOSE to serve God alone.

In Focus

Bryce was convinced that he had the answers to every question. He was always a smart kid, and now that he had graduated from a top university, he was convinced that he understood the world better than his parents.

“I don’t need to go to church. I know you guys are used to that stuff, but religion is all man-made anyway. A great philosopher says, ‘religion is the opiate of the people,’ and I see that more than any of that spooky spiritual stuff actually working for people. Your generation was always in church or working hard, and where did that get us?”

Brandon, his older brother, looked at him with righteous anger. “You have no idea what God has done for this family, do you?” he seethed.

“What are you talking about?” Bryce said, taken aback.

“How do you think you got here? Did you know that your mom almost died giving birth to you? That your grandfather was almost killed getting out of the South? That your prestigious education was paid for by money we didn’t have, but God provided? Your cousin got into a car accident last night, and I bet you’ve been so consumed with your own pride you didn’t even stop to pray.”

“I...didn’t know,” Bryce said sheepishly. Lottie, Brandon and Bryce’s mom, rushed in and said, “Your cousin made it through surgery stable! Praise God, He answered our prayers!”

How has God’s power shown up in your life?



Keep in Mind

“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” (1 Kings 18:21, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **1 Kings 18:20** 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.

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.

36 And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

Mount Carmel. This mountain was on the border of Israelite and Phoenician territory. It was considered a place of worship for both nations. It has a low range of mountains running northwest to southeast from the Mediterranean Sea to the fertile Plain of Esdraelon.

Baal. A Canaanite god of the storm and fertility. The word itself means a partner or ally. It is used to indicate mastery or ownership. Droughts indicated that Baal was either dead or temporarily captive. When he came back, fields, flocks, and families flourished. The people were taught to act out a magical ritual of sacred marriage to ensure the earth's fertility.

Asherah. A major Canaanite goddess associated with passion and the sea. During the time of King Ahab and Jezebel, Asherah and Baal were worshiped together. When Elijah confronted the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, the 400 prophets of Asherah were summoned by Elijah but did not attend the event.

Background

Jezebel was a native of Phoenicia. The Phoenicians were noted for their skills and business aptitude, but they were devoted worshipers of Baal. King Ahab allowed Jezebel to place the prophets of Baal in influential

positions in Israel. Her plan was to replace the worship of the Lord with the worship of Baal.

The Phoenicians lived on a narrow strip of land northwest of Palestine on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Two of the main places in Phoenicia mentioned in the Bible are Tyre and Sidon. The area is now known as Lebanon and coastal Syria. These people once occupied the land of Canaan, but they were driven out by Israel and crowded into a narrow strip of coastline.

At one time, the Phoenicians had a good working relationship with Israel. Hiram, of Tyre, was a friend of David and Solomon. He helped Israel equip its merchant fleet. However, over the centuries, these friendly relations led to sin for the nation of Israel. The Phoenician religion was a carryover from the Canaanite worship system, which included child sacrifice. Baal became the main god.

The New Testament mentioned Tyre and Sidon. Jesus healed a demon-possessed girl from that area. Early Christian believers witnessed in Phoenicia after leaving Jerusalem. Paul often traveled through this area.

Throughout biblical history, God allowed His people to associate with Phoenicia. This incident on Mount Carmel was not the first time, nor would it be the last, when God called Israel and its people to recognize Him and forsake their false gods.

How can knowing a place's history help us understand its culture today?

At-A-Glance

1. Elijah's Challenge to the People (1 Kings 18:20–21)
2. Elijah Called on God (vv. 30–37)
3. Elijah's God was Victorious (vv. 38–39)

In Depth

1. Elijah's Challenge to the People (1 Kings 18:20–21)

In the third year of Elijah's stay at the widow in Zarephath's home, God spoke to Elijah. He told him to go back and confront Ahab. God was about to send rain upon the land again. The three-year drought and famine had not been enough to convince King Ahab to turn from his idolatrous worship. It was time to call the nation into repentance and return to serving the one true and living God.

When Elijah appeared before Ahab, the king called him a "troubler of Israel." He saw Elijah as the problem, not his own rebellion against the Lord.

Elijah boldly replied to Ahab that he was the one who brought trouble by abandoning the Lord and worshipping idols. Elijah challenged Ahab to gather the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah to come to Mount Carmel.

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal in one of the most dramatic events in the book of 1 Kings. This one prophet challenged a whole nation to return to God and wipe out the opposition. Elijah called for a commitment to the true and living God and a public declaration of their faith in Him. This was spoken in the face of Ahab and Jezebel, who were attempting to turn this nation into one that was completely dedicated to Baal.

The people of Israel and the prophets of Baal were also present at Mount Carmel. Elijah boldly challenged the people in the presence of these false prophets, "How long will you go on limping or wavering between two opinions?" He wanted them to exclusively worship Baal or Yahweh. It was impossible to follow both. The people would not answer a word. They knew in their hearts God's law required complete loyalty to Him. But to be committed to God might cost them their lives under Ahab's rule.

2. Elijah Called on God (vv. 30–37)

On Mount Carmel, Elijah gave the prophets of Baal all the advantages. The Baal prophets chose the sacrifice. Elijah allowed them to pray for as long as they wished. The proof of God's power or Baal's power was to be fire. Baal was supposed to be the god of the sun and the god of the storm. For him to show up and produce fire should have been easy.

The worshipers of Baal danced wildly around the altar. After a while, when there was no response from Baal, Elijah began to mock and taunt the Baal worshipers, saying, "Has your god gone on a trip? Has he gone to the bathroom? Is he asleep? Maybe you should call louder." The prophets became more earnest and intense in their worship. They began to cut themselves. The practice of self-inflicted wounds was supposed to arouse a deity's pity or response. They ranted and raved. After all of this performance, after calling out to him all day, Baal did not appear.

By late afternoon, Elijah decided it was his turn. He called the people near. He wanted no questions or accusations from the people about trickery or clever games. They gathered around the broken-down altar of the Lord. Elijah restored it. Evidently, an altar was already on Mount Carmel. The Baal worshipers probably destroyed it. Before the building of Solomon's temple, several places in Israel had altars to the Lord.

Elijah built up 12 stones, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. Even though the nation was now divided—the Northern Kingdom, Israel, consisted of ten tribes, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, consisted of two—Elijah still used the stones to symbolize God's people as twelve united tribes.

Elijah built a trench around the altar and then arranged the sacrifice on the altar. Four pails of water were poured three times upon the burnt offering. The water flowed around

the altar in the trench. The prophet wanted no doubt that this was God working and that there was no deception on the part of Elijah. False prophets had been known to set fire to the wood of the sacrifices from spaces underneath the altar to make people believe that the sacrifice had been set on fire by their false god.

After the altar was prepared and drenched with water, Elijah calmly prayed. This must have been anticlimactic in comparison to the ravings of the previous worshipers. He called on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "Prove now that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant and have done all this at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me so that this people will know that you, the Lord, are God and that you are bringing them back to yourself" (vv. 36–37, Good News). Elijah prayed not only for a miracle but for the conversion of Israel.

3. Elijah's God was Victorious (vv. 38–39)

After Elijah's simple prayer, the fire from the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the altar. It also consumed the altar's stones and licked up the water in the trench. God proved Himself to be present and mighty.

After this remarkable demonstration, the people pledged their allegiance to Him. The people cried out, "The Lord, He is God!" "Yahweh is Elohim!" Those words in Hebrew were actually Elijah's name! "Yah is El!"

At this point, the prophets of Baal could have confessed their wrong and joined the people of God. However, they did not confess and repent. Therefore, Elijah called for the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. According to the Old Testament Law, Elijah commanded that they be seized and slain. (Deuteronomy 13:5). The Law stated that false prophets should be destroyed. The prophets were led down to the Brook of Kishon. The Brook of Kishon was connected to a waterway in Phoenicia. The

blood of the prophets traveled back to their home, where it belonged.

After this demonstration of God's power, one would think Ahab and Jezebel would have given up. But they continued to challenge Elijah. Jezebel even threatened Elijah's life. Their hearts were truly hardened against the Lord.

Search the Scriptures

Answer the following with a vocabulary word from the lesson:

1. Those who represent a deity. (1 Kings 18:20)
2. A popular false god. (v. 21)
3. The 7th king of Israel. (v. 20)
4. The mountain in-between two nations (v. 20)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did Ahab think Elijah was the cause of the problem?
2. What does it mean to "halt between two opinions?" How were the Israelites doing this? How do we do this today?
3. God gave a mighty demonstration of His power on Mount Caramel. Do we have any prophets today like Elijah? Any Mount Caramel experiences? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

People in our world today try to do religion on their own, taking on the practices they find most interesting or helpful instead of joining a community of faith where they can be accountable. They may have ancestral altars, repeat mantras, celebrate Christmas, eat kosher food, have a prayer rug, and consider themselves spiritual but not religious. They don't commit to one thing or another, especially concerning spiritual matters. However, when it comes to Jesus, He challenges us to get on one side or the other. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise

the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Application for Activation

"Compromise" means to settle differences with a mutual agreement. Many times, Christians will agree when someone says, "All religions are the same," or "Christianity is a white man's religion," and "Do what you want as long as you don't hurt anybody." Sometimes, to keep the peace, we nod in agreement, even when we know what the person has said is wrong.

Have you ever had a Mount Carmel experience? Do you need to? How can we challenge false teachings and ideas in our present situations?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Baal. BAIL / ba-AHL.

Elijah. i-LYE-juh.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 64

Deuteronomy 28–29

Psalms 31:1–8

DAY 65

Deuteronomy 30–31

Psalms 31:9–15

DAY 66

Deuteronomy 32–34

Psalms 31:16–24

DAY 67

Joshua 1–4

Psalms 32:1–5

DAY 68

Joshua 5–8

Psalms 32:6–11

DAY 69

Joshua 9–11

Psalms 33:1–5

DAY 70

Joshua 12–15

Psalms 33:6–11

Notes
