



LESSON 28

Elijah and the prophets of Baal

1 KINGS 16:29-17:1; 18:1-2, 17-46



The LORD alone is God, so follow Him alone.



“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God’” (1 Kgs18:39).

Supporting Truths

1. The LORD alone is God.
2. The LORD’s power proves He is God.
3. The LORD’s unbreakable word proves He is God.
4. The LORD’s answers to prayer prove that He is God.
5. The LORD shows people He is God so that they will follow Him alone.

Objectives

1. State what “Elijah” means.
2. Describe how the LORD showed His power on Mount Carmel.
3. List three things God said would happen that happened in this story.
4. List several characteristics of Elijah’s prayers, and describe God’s answers.
5. Explain Elijah’s goal for Israel and for Ahab.



Lesson Summary

Jeroboam perverted the worship of the LORD, but Ahab replaced it entirely. He led Israel to worship Baal instead of the true God. So God sent Elijah to declare that the LORD alone is God. God proved this by predicting the future, by stopping and starting the rain, by sending fire to burn up Elijah's sacrifice, by answering prayer, and by empowering Elijah to outrun Ahab's chariot. Baal could not do any of these things. Therefore, Elijah urged Israel and Ahab to follow the LORD alone.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The LORD proved to Israel that He is God by displaying His great power at Mount Carmel. And He did that with even greater power when He came to earth as the man Jesus Christ. Jesus proved His power by His miracles and by His victory over sin, Satan, and death. He also displays His power in believers by giving them the Holy Spirit. Because He is the true God, Jesus demands that we follow Him without reservation.

LAST WEEK



God punishes Jeroboam
1 Kings 12:1–33; 14:1–18

THIS WEEK



Elijah and the prophets of Baal
1 Kings 16:29–17:1; 18:1–2, 17–46

NEXT WEEK



God is glorified by protecting Judah
2 Kings 18:1–19:37

DIVIDED KINGDOM

Lesson Commentary

The LORD alone is God, so follow Him alone.

The book of Kings proves that God was just and right to exile Israel from their land. Israel kept rebelling in spite of God's word, patience, and merciful intervention. Jeroboam, for example, rejected God's promises and ignored God's warnings (1 Kgs 12–14). But Ahab was even worse (16:30, 33). Besides continuing Jeroboam's phony religion, Ahab also married wicked Jezebel, and together they established Baal worship as Israel's national religion (16:31–32). In their days the word of God was openly defied (16:34). So God sent Elijah to show Ahab and all Israel that God's word cannot be ignored, for the LORD alone is God: He alone deserves worship, He alone has power, and He alone answers prayer.

The LORD stopped the rain (16:29–17:1; 18:1–2, 17–18)

As Israel turned to the worship of Baal, God sent a **prophet** to confront their growing idolatry. His name was Elijah, meaning "The LORD is my God" (17:1). As one through whom God spoke, his message was like his name. Elijah was sent to declare that the LORD was God and there was no other. Elijah warned that The LORD was about to punish Israel for their idolatry by stopping the rain (Lev 26:18–19; Deut 11:16–17; 28:23–24). This was especially humiliating for Baal, who was supposed to be in control of the rain. Since Israel lacked river irrigation like

Egypt, rain was necessary for food. Thus, by causing a drought, and by announcing it in advance (Isa 42:9), the LORD showed that He, not Baal, was the true God.



THINK ABOUT IT

The LORD alone declares the end from the beginning (Isa 46:9–10).

The ideals people worship today have much in common with Baal worship. Baal worship was tangible, exciting, entertaining, and sensual, and the goal of Baal worship was prosperity and success. Not much has changed today. Modern man continues to pursue material prosperity, worship health, embrace immorality, escape reality through entertainment, and live for the next exciting adrenaline rush. However, these pursuits are empty and powerless to deliver. They are, like Baal, dead and deadening.

They are "less than nothing" and an "abomination" (Isa 41:24).

God's curse was the result of Ahab's idolatry, but Ahab accused Elijah of troubling Israel (1 Kgs 18:17). At that time everything in Israel seemed to be going well: the kingdom was stable, there was a new, permanent capital, and trade relations with the Phoenicians were prosperous. If only those intolerant believers in the LORD would stop meddling! A thousand years later, pagans would blame early Christians for Rome's problems, and even today, in places where Christianity used to be valued, unbelievers accuse Christians of halting "progress" through their rigid commitment to God's standards. Yet, as Elijah declared, the wicked are the ones who bring trouble by abandoning the precepts of God (18:18).

Elijah's test proved that Baal is not God (18:19–29)

To see who was right, Elijah proposed a contest (18:19). In the process he also challenged Israel to fully commit to following the LORD (18:21). They had not yet wholly rejected the LORD, but they were unwilling to worship Him alone. They were "limping" along between two choices. By refusing to commit, Israel was crippling itself. So Elijah called Israel to **worship** the LORD alone. Their praise, devotion, and obedience must no longer be divided between the LORD and Baal.

The contest would settle who was God. And since both the LORD (Ps 18:14; 29:3–9; 104:3) and Baal were believed to possess power over thunder, lightning, and storms, it would be a fair test. The winner would demonstrate that he alone was God. But when Baal's prophets prayed all morning, "there was no voice" (1 Kgs 18:26), implying that there was also no Baal. They grew more frantic, "limping" around the altar in their powerlessness. Finally, they cut themselves, hoping to manipulate their gods by arousing their pity. Yet all their idolatrous worship was worthless.

As Baal's prophets limped and bled, Elijah mocked them and their god. They had made Baal in their own image, so maybe he, like man, was busy, or traveling,

THINK ABOUT IT

Those who worship idols feed on ashes (Isa 44:20).



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Elijah and the prophets of Baal • 1 Kings 16:29–17:1; 18:1–2, 17–46



or asleep (18:27). But as morning passed into afternoon there was nothing: no voice, no answer, and no response (18:29). That's because false gods cannot hear. They are worthless, like scarecrows in a cucumber field (Jer 10:5) or logs cast into the fire (Isa 44:16–17).

Elijah's test proved that the LORD is God (18:30–40)

While the chaotic prophets raved into the afternoon, Elijah calmly prepared to call upon the Lord. He rebuilt the LORD's broken altar, using 12 stones to represent the 12 tribes of Israel (1 Kgs 18:30–31). Although Israel was divided politically, the one altar demonstrated that Israel was not to be divided religiously. Israel as a whole still belonged to the LORD. Finally, Elijah soaked the wood and the altar with water to make it clear that the fire about to come was from God (18:33–35).

The preparations complete, Elijah prayed (18:36). Praying at the time of the evening sacrifice connected Elijah's worship to the temple worship prescribed by God. He did not imitate the ravings of Baal's prophets, for the LORD forbids cutting (Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1) and cannot be manipulated (Matt 6:7). Instead he prayed by *faith, depending wholly on God*. He prayed for the sake of the LORD's honor (1 Kgs 18:36), trusting in God's sovereignty even over Israel's sin (18:37). These are the marks of godly prayer: it depends on God and seeks God's glory.

God is not bound to give us all that we pray for (Dan 3:17–18; Matt 26:39), but while God is free to carry out His will, He also loves to answer prayer (Matt 7:11). In this case, the LORD answered Elijah immediately and powerfully. He burned up not just the offering, as the terms of the contest stipulated, but also the wood, stones, dust, and water too (1 Kgs 18:38)! The LORD often goes above and beyond what is required to prove that He is *omnipotent, unlimited in power* (Matt 14:20). The LORD, not Baal, answers prayer (Isa 65:24). The LORD, not Baal, controls the storm.

So when the people saw the fire from the LORD they shouted, "Yahweh is God!" (1 Kgs 18:39). *Yahweh* is God's covenant name, the "name of God's redeeming love," the name by which He declared His plan to deliver

Israel from Egypt to be His own people (Exod 3:14). In the English Bible they translate the term as "LORD" or "GOD." Recognizing this, the people killed Baal's prophets according to God's law (1 Kgs 18:40; Deut 13:13–18; 17:2–7).

The LORD sent rain (18:41–46)

Now that Baal was exposed as a fraud, the LORD could restore rain to Israel without people thinking the rain was from Baal. So Elijah told Ahab to eat and drink, for the drought was over (1 Kgs 18:41). After his bold prediction, Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel to pray while Ahab went up to celebrate (18:42). But this time God did not answer Elijah immediately (18:43). Yet Elijah persevered in humble dependence until a small cloud appeared (18:44). The cloud grew into a storm, resulting in a torrential downpour (18:44–45). The diligent prayer of a righteous man is powerful (Jas 5:16–18), and the answers of the true God are above and beyond all that we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20).

Finally, the LORD empowered Elijah to run before Ahab's chariot the 15 to 25 miles back to Jezreel (1 Kgs 18:46). This signified the LORD's power, but it also demonstrated Elijah's loyalty. Elijah acted like one of Ahab's servants, running before his chariot. It was an opportunity for Ahab to consider all he had just seen and repent. If he would follow the words of God's prophet, God's prophet would be his servant instead of his enemy.

Jesus Christ has made a similar offer. Jesus proved that He is the LORD, the only God, by dying and rising from the dead. He demonstrated the power of God by His miracles and His victory over sin, Satan, and death (Col 2:15). He proved the unbreakable word of God by fulfilling numerous prophecies (Isa 7:14; Micah 5:2; Matt 5:17). So now let us stop limping between two opinions; since Jesus is Lord, we must follow Him alone.

THINK ABOUT IT

Our Heavenly Father delights to give good things to His children (Matt 7:11).



THINK ABOUT IT

There is no neutrality before God—we are either for Him or against Him.



Lesson Outline

The LORD alone is God, so follow Him alone.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. Ahab's prophets prayed to Baal (18:25–28).
2. Baal did not answer (18:29).
3. Elijah prayed to God (18:30–37).
4. God sent fire from heaven (18:38).
5. The people knew the LORD is God (18:39–40).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The LORD stopped the rain (16:29–17:1; 18:1–2, 17–18).**
 - Ahab led Israel into Baal worship and defied the LORD (16:29–34).
 - The LORD stopped the rain because of Ahab and Israel's idolatry (17:1).
 - The LORD sent Elijah to Ahab because He was about to send rain again (18:1–2).
 - Ahab and Elijah accused each other of destroying Israel (18:17–18).
2. **Elijah's test proved that Baal is not God (18:19–29).**
 - Elijah called for a test to see who is God (18:19–24).
 - The prophets of Baal raved while Elijah mocked (18:25–28).
 - Baal sent no fire and gave no answer at all (18:29).
3. **Elijah's test proved that the LORD is God (18:30–40)**
 - Elijah rebuilt the LORD's altar and covered it with water (18:30–35).
 - Elijah prayed for the LORD to turn the hearts of His people back to Him (18:36–37).
 - The LORD sent fire and burned up the offering, the altar, and the water (18:38).
 - The people said "The LORD is God" and killed Baal's prophets (18:39–40).
4. **The LORD sent rain (18:41–46)**
 - Elijah prophesied rain and prayed for rain (18:41–44).
 - The LORD sent lots of rain (18:45).
 - The LORD empowered Elijah to outrace Ahab's chariot (18:46).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What false god did Ahab's prophets pray to?**
Baal.
- 2. Did Baal send fire to burn up their offering?**
No. There was not even a tiny answer.
- 3. Who did Elijah pray to?**
Elijah prayed to the LORD, the true God.
- 4. Did the LORD send fire to burn up his offering?**
Yes. And He burned up the whole altar and the water, too, because He is omnipotent.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Why was Ahab more wicked than any of Israel's previous kings?**
King Ahab officially introduced Baal worship into the nation of Israel.
- 2. How did the LORD punish Israel for worshiping Baal?**
The LORD caused a drought, which showed that Baal did not really have any power to send rain.
- 3. What does Elijah's name mean?**
“The LORD is my God.” That was his message: The LORD is God; Baal is not.
- 4. Was Ahab right to blame Elijah for troubling Israel?**
No. Trouble comes to those who turn away from following the LORD alone.
- 5. What contest did Elijah propose?**
Baal's prophets would prepare a sacrifice to Baal, and Elijah would prepare one to the LORD. Then they would pray and see if Baal or the LORD would send fire to burn up the sacrifice. The one who sent the fire would prove to be God.
- 6. Why did Elijah propose this contest?**
Elijah wanted Israel to stop “limping” between two decisions. They needed to see that the LORD alone is God, so that they would follow Him alone.
- 7. Contrast the way Baal's prophets prayed with the way Elijah prayed?**
Baal's prophets raved and cut themselves. Elijah prayed calmly, simply, and humbly. He prayed for God's glory and for the good of Israel.
- 8. How did the LORD prove that He is God?**
While no answer came from Baal, the LORD answered by burning up the offering, the altar, and the water too. Then God proved His power again by sending lots of rain and by empowering Elijah to outrun Ahab's chariot.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

WHAT IF?

Imagine what it would be like without water or food. Ask, "Who takes baths? Who has gone swimming? Who likes to drink water, juice, or soda? What if there was no more water to take baths, to go swimming, or even to drink your favorite drink?" Then ask, "Who has ever been really, really hungry? Have you ever run out of food and had to go to the store to get some more? What if the grocery stores ran out of food? How would you get food to eat? In today's story we'll learn about a time when God stopped the rain.

THE STORM IS COMING

Have the children sit in a circle and imitate you as you lead them through making storm sounds. Begin by snapping your fingers; then pat your chest, pat your thighs, slap the floor, and blow air out of your mouth. If you want, you can lead the children back through the motions, ending with snapping fingers. Ask the children whether those sounds remind them of anything. When they answer "rain," tell them that in today's lesson they will be learning about a time when God stopped the rain, then sent it again.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD IS SUPREME

The word supreme refers to something that is the greatest, highest, or best. Have some fun with the children by testing their knowledge of "est." The biggest mammal, the fastest land animal, the tallest animal, strongest man, etc. The biggest animal is not also the fastest and the tallest. You can normally only be an "est" in one particular way. Imagine someone who is the biggest, fastest, strongest, most intelligent, wisest, and so on. That someone would be our God. He is supreme, unchallenged in all His qualities.

WHO'S ON THE OTHER END?

Bring in two tin cans attached by a string. Show the children how you can use it like a telephone. Let the children speak and listen through it. Now put one can on the ground, speak into the other can, and then listen for a response. Keep trying until the children point out that no one is on the other end. Explain this is what Baal's prophets were like. They never got even a whisper, showing that Baal did not exist. The LORD alone is God.



APPLY

GOD GLORIFIES HIMSELF

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, brown construction paper, orange paper or tissue paper, cotton balls, glue, and blue or silver glitter (or glitter paint).

Directions: Pre-cut logs from brown construction paper. Instruct the students to use the paper logs and orange tissue paper (or orange paper flames) to create fire on the left side of the craft sheet. They can create the rainstorm on the right side of the sheet by using cotton balls as clouds and sprinkling glue with blue or silver glitter to represent the rain.

God Glorifies Himself
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

FOR REAL

There are many things in our lives that are made to look real but really are not. Sometimes a test is the best way to prove that something is real. A shatterproof ruler might provide a dramatic example. Only the genuine product can be bent over double and not shatter. Demonstrate this by bending both a shatterproof and non-shatterproof ruler in front of the class. In today's lesson we will learn about a test that God gave His people so they could know that He alone was God.

CAMPFIRE MATERIALS

Tell the children that you'd like to build a campfire, but no matter how hard you try, you can't seem to start a fire. Pull out the materials you've been using and ask the children if they can identify the problem. Items to show the children include: wood, a spray bottle full of water, a damp cloth, matches, stones, garden hose, fire extinguisher, etc. Tell the children that today we're going to learn how the prophet Elijah asked God to show that He was the only God by burning an altar that was covered with water.



ILLUSTRATE

GOOD FOR NOTHING

Cut a paper cup in half from top to bottom. Show that it's not very useful when it's divided. Then use a cup that is whole. A heart divided between God and idols is useless. Our hearts need to belong completely to God.

IT LOOKS LIKE RAIN

Throughout the lesson, ask a child or another leader seven times if it looks like it is going to rain (you could hold up an umbrella each time you ask). Six times he should say "no," but on the seventh time he should say that he sees a small cloud and that it looks like it will rain. Tell the children what happened after Elijah's servant saw a small cloud.



APPLY

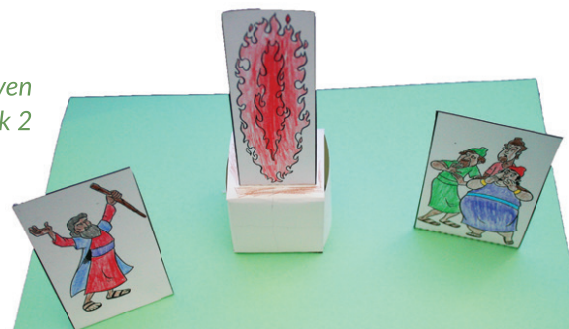
GOD SENDS FIRE FROM HEAVEN

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, construction paper, scissors, glue, and crayons.

Directions: Have children color and cut out all pictures from the craft sheet. Cut out the box template and put it together to form an altar. Glue the fire on top of the altar. Glue the altar and pictures to the construction paper. Glue the verse to the bottom of the paper.

*God Sends Fire from Heaven
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



AGES 9–11



A MIND DIVIDED

Have a child come up to the whiteboard. Tell him to draw a smiley face in one color and a frowny face in another color. Have him start with the smiley face, but just as he begins, tell him to switch colors and draw the frowny face. Keep going back and forth so that the child never has a chance to draw either one. Show that his problem is that he is not focused in just one direction. His focus and energy are divided, crippling his efforts. This is what had happened to Israel in today's lesson.

IMAGINARY FRIEND

Introduce the class to your imaginary friend. Pretend to shake hands with him or give him a hug. Ask the children if they think he is real. When they say no, redouble your efforts to prove that he exists. You might even devise some kind of test in which your friend could prove his existence. After finally admitting that your friend doesn't exist, read Isaiah 44:9–20 together as a class. Explain that in today's lesson we'll see that Israel had fallen into the sin of idolatry, worshipping a god that did not exist.



LIMPING BETWEEN TWO CHOICES

Bring in two long pieces of wood. Lay the wood flat on the ground in the shape of a V (ends fairly close at one end but far apart at the other end). Have the children try to walk the length of them with a foot on one and the other foot on the other. The boards should get far enough apart that the children are eventually unable to keep going with a foot on each piece of wood. Then have them walk on just one piece of wood straight from one end to the other. It should be much quicker, though not necessarily easy. Compare to Israel limping between two choices.

DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Wear the apparel of two rival sports teams or countries at the same time. Tell the class that real fans support both sides equally, even though they are bitter rivals. Ask the children what they think. Use this activity to illustrate the sinful hesitation of the people in 1 Kings 18:21. The people had not totally rejected God, but their divided worship was not acceptable to God.



WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Ask the children what worship is. In today's lesson we saw two groups of people who worshiped different gods. Elijah worshiped the true God of Israel, and the priests of Baal worshiped Baal. So what is worship? Ask the children to give examples. Explain that worship is praising and living reverently for someone or something. This involves obedience. Who do the children obey? God, and those He has placed over us, or their own desires?