

## Week 4: The Prophets of Baal Defeated: 1 Kings 18:1–46

### Hook



**Main Point:** Yahweh alone is God; all other “gods” are nothing.

**Q:** What are some of the most memorable showdowns in history – moments when two sides faced off and everyone knew something significant was about to happen? What made those moments so powerful or unforgettable?

In 1974, the world gathered for what was called *The Rumble in the Jungle* – a heavyweight title fight between the undefeated, intimidating champion George Foreman and the doubted underdog Muhammad Ali. On paper, it looked like no contest. Foreman was bigger, stronger and seemingly unstoppable. Most people thought the outcome was obvious before the first punch was thrown.<sup>1</sup> But when the fight began, Ali endured, waited, and exposed his opponent’s weakness, proving that what seemed powerful was not ultimately superior. Mount Carmel is an even greater showdown – not for a championship belt, but for the hearts of a nation. On one side stand 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, backed by the king and queen, representing the official state religion. On the other side stands one prophet who has been hiding in the wilderness, sustained only by God. If you were judging by numbers or appearances, you would expect one outcome. But this is not a fair fight between equals; it is a public exposure. When the fire falls, it will reveal what was true all along: Yahweh alone is God, and all other “gods” are nothing.

**RECAP:** In the first lesson, we talked about the role of the Old Testament prophets as God’s messengers and how they pointed ahead to Jesus as the ultimate prophet who not only spoke God’s Word but *was* God’s Word made flesh.

In week 2, we saw God’s provision for both Elijah and the widow of Zarephath during the drought, which was a consequence for Israel’s idolatry. In lesson 3, God raised her son from the dead, showing not only His sovereign power but also His care for the vulnerable and His heart for all the nations, not just Israel.

This week, we will see God's superiority over other "gods" as Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

## **Week 4: The Prophets of Baal Defeated: 1 Kings 18:1–46**

### **Book**

**Main Point: Yahweh alone is God; all other “gods” are nothing.**

**1 Kings 18:1–19 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** God always preserves a remnant of faithful followers.

**Q: Who was Obadiah? How did he show himself faithful to the Lord?**

**Q: Why was Obadiah afraid to tell Ahab that he had seen Elijah?**

At this point in the story, three years had passed since the drought had begun and the famine was severe in Israel. Ahab, king of Israel, asked his second-in-command, Obadiah, to split the kingdom between him and Ahab and they would each go looking for grass for the animals could eat so they would not all die. (Note: this is not the same Obadiah who wrote the prophetic book of Obadiah in Scripture. That Obadiah was a prophet to Judah [S], not Israel [N], about 25 years later, and his book was a judgment on the nation of Edom because of their violence and gloating over Judah’s suffering.)

Obadiah means “servant of Yahweh,” and this Obadiah truly was. He was the second-in-command to Ahab and yet, when Jezebel massacred the Lord’s prophets, Obadiah hid 100 of them in a cave and fed them, putting himself in grave danger. The revelation of this detail lets us know that even though Elijah *thought* he was alone and *felt* very alone, he was not the only faithful prophet left. He was alone when he challenged the 450 prophets of Baal. And afterward, when he ran from Ahab and Jezebel, he told Yahweh he thought he was the only prophet left. But God told him there were 7,000 who had remained faithful to Him.

The text doesn’t say why God didn’t bring those other 100 prophets out of hiding to help Elijah. However, one man defeating 450 prophets is far more dramatic than 101 defeating 450, and it highlights God’s extraordinary power. This placed a heavy emotional burden on Elijah, but the Lord gave him the strength to persevere. Feeling as if God is all you have on your side can help you grow in faith dramatically.

While Obadiah was searching for grass for the animals to eat, he ran into Elijah, who was on his way to Ahab’s palace. God had told Elijah it was time to end the drought and to come out of hiding and show himself to Ahab. This put Elijah in danger, but because God had commanded him to do it, he trusted God to protect him. He had been in hiding throughout the three and a half years of the drought – first by the brook, then with the widow in Zarephath. Ahab had been looking for him to kill him the entire time; Obadiah said there was no kingdom where Ahab had not looked for him. He even made every nation swear an oath that they had not found him.

When Obadiah saw Elijah, he bowed before him and called him “my lord.” Yet he didn’t want to go tell Ahab to go meet Elijah. He was worried that if he did, Elijah would be taken away by the Holy Spirit and Ahab would kill him when he couldn’t find Elijah. Elijah promised he would not disappear, so Obadiah went. When Ahab came out to meet Elijah, he called him “you troubler of Israel,” but Elijah said it was Ahab who had brought trouble on Israel by his idolatry. Elijah asked him to send for the prophets of Baal (450) and Asherah (400) to meet him at Mount Carmel, along with all of Israel.

This was a total of 850 prophets and the detail that they “ate at Jezebel’s table” tells us they were financially supported by the royal household, under royal protection, and officially endorsed as the state religion. It’s also noteworthy that the king/queen still had enough food to feed their whole royal household and 850 prophets, even during a famine. This would have meant they were hoarding food and the regular people were even more destitute than they would have been. Jezebel had killed all the prophets of Yahweh, except Elijah and the 100 who were in hiding. So Baal and Asherah worship was the state religion at this point. It wasn’t even syncretism (blending Yahweh worship with other religions) anymore.

Elijah came out of hiding and confronted Ahab directly, issuing a challenge: Yahweh against Baal/Asherah. One prophet who had been living in the wilderness with a poor widow, sustained only by the supernatural power of God, versus 850 prophets who had been living large at the table of the queen. This was a stark contrast, intentionally so. God was about to show that He alone is the Lord of all.

**Q: Describe a time when you have felt alone in your faith. What did you learn? How did you grow in your dependence on God during that time?**

**Q: How does it help to have other believers in your life to encourage and support you?**

**Q: Obadiah served God while working inside a corrupt government that was idolatrous. What can we learn from his example about being faithful to God where faith may not be encouraged?**

**1 Kings 18:20–29 and Deuteronomy 32:15–18 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Yahweh is the only God.

**Q: What happened when the prophets of Baal called on him to show himself? (1 Kings)**

**Q: Who were the “gods” to which the people sacrificed? (Deuteronomy)**

Imagine being a regular person in Israel during this moment. Ahab had become king and married Jezebel. They had kicked out the prophets of Yahweh and established Baal worship as the national religion. Elijah declared that Yahweh was giving them a drought and then disappeared for more than three years. Baal was the storm god, the god of rain and therefore fertility for the crops. But they had been worshipping Baal this whole

time and there was still a terrible drought! Then Elijah suddenly reappeared, gathered the people together, and told them to stop going back and forth between Yahweh and Baal. He didn't just say, "Choose one." He said, "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." He was challenging them to follow whichever one is real.

At this point, you might think people would say, "Hey, maybe Baal isn't real, considering he hasn't given us rain in three years. Maybe Elijah's God *is* real, because he prophesied the drought and it actually happened." But they didn't. The people did not answer him. Was it fear of going against Ahab and Jezebel? Doubt? Confusion? We don't really know, but in response, Elijah offered to prove to them which God was real. This time they answered, "That is a good idea." The evidence they already had wasn't enough for them; they needed a specific sign.

The prophets of Baal prepared their altar and called on Baal, but nothing happened. Elijah began to mock the prophets of Baal: Maybe he is asleep, or on a journey, deep in thought, or even relieving himself. These are human limitations, not divine. Elijah was minimizing Baal's deity. They leaped on the altar and cut themselves in an ancient ritual; they believed the blood would awaken the gods or coerce them to do what humans wanted. This practice of self-laceration was forbidden in Israel because of its association with magic and pagan gods (Deuteronomy 14:1). Israel's God doesn't need to be awakened. He cannot be bribed, coerced, or manipulated. Their raving went on all day, from morning until dusk<sup>2</sup>, but no one answered them. Either Baal didn't care to answer them or he wasn't really there.

Deuteronomy 32 is a song. God had just renewed His covenant with the second generation to come out of Egypt, after their parents' generation had failed to trust in Him. God told them that when they entered the land they would worship other gods, so He would turn His face away from them and they would have many troubles. God gave Moses this song and told him to teach it to the people so when those troubles came upon them, the song would convict them. The song says these other "gods" are not gods, but demons. Yahweh is the one who cared for them, guided them, and provided for them. Demons do have supernatural power, but much less than God. And demons do not love us, care for us, or want what's best for us; they try to manipulate us, trick us, and destroy us.

Today, most of us don't worship physical idols, but we do put our trust in other "gods" we believe can give us things – money, power, success – just as the ancients believed Baal could give them a good harvest. Like Israel with Baal, we say we trust in God, but we put our trust in the things of this world. Our false "gods" are like Baal; they promise life, security and blessing, but when we really need them, they do not answer. They cannot deliver. They can even manipulate and destroy us. One day we'll find out they, like Baal, were never really gods at all.

**Q: What are some modern "gods" people turn to for security, identity, or happiness instead of trusting God?**

**Q: How have you found the things of this world to be empty? How have they not delivered on their promises of life, joy and blessing in your life?**

**Q: How can you encourage others to put their trust in God instead by sharing how He has worked in your life?**

**1 Kings 18:30–46 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Only God is the source of life, provision and flourishing.

**Q: Why did Elijah pour water over the altar? What did that prove?**

**Q: How do we see the purpose of this miracle in Elijah’s words to God?**

**Q: What does this miracle teach us about the difference between trusting God and trusting human efforts or circumstances?**

When Baal didn’t respond, Elijah gathered the people to him. He rebuilt the altar to Yahweh that had been torn down, using 12 stones for the 12 tribes of Israel, even though the kingdom was divided. This northern nation (10 tribes) was the rebellious group that had split off, but Elijah was calling them back – to repent and return to the Lord, to restore the kingdom of God. This wasn’t a political statement about the physical kingdom of Israel; it was a covenant statement.

By using 12 stones, Elijah was saying God had not abandoned His promises to all Israel even though the kingdom was divided. He was calling the rebellious northern tribes back to their true identity. Reminding them they were the same people God had redeemed from Egypt. Jesus also chose 12 disciples, even though at His time in history, the Jewish people were the remnant of Judah. Jesus was rebuilding the people of God, completing the work of the covenant. The disciples were the living stones that became the new covenant community.

Elijah poured 12 jars of water over the wood of the altar – it would never have caught fire through natural means – so they would know this was THE God, so they would know he was God’s prophet, doing what God commanded. Fire immediately came down. He didn’t have to wait all day. He didn’t have to cut himself, do any magic tricks, or recite incantations. He simply called on the Lord. The fire was so great it not only consumed the wet wood and the bull but even the stones and all the water. The people responded in worship and declared, “Yahweh, He is God!” Not Baal, only Yahweh.

Elijah slaughtered all the prophets of Baal. Then the rain came. The drought had begun with Elijah announcing it as a punishment for their idolatry. Now that the people had repented and turned their hearts back to God, the rain came. They had to see clearly and explicitly that Baal could not answer. Baal could not control the rain. Baal was not real. Yahweh alone is God. The rain came only after Yahweh was honored, when His

prophet said so. As rain brings life, food and flourishing, Yahweh is the only One who can bring life, provision and flourishing.

In the Gospels, Jesus called Himself the Living Water. He doesn't just bring life; He *is* life. Elijah brought rain, but Jesus is the constant source of water that will never run dry. Whoever trusts in Him will never thirst. Baal promised rain but could not give it. The world promises happiness but cannot give it. Only Jesus can truly satisfy. When we repent and turn to Jesus, we will find true life, not only eternal life in heaven but the abundant life of true flourishing here on earth. Like a well-watered garden, nourished by God's constant presence, overflowing with spiritual fruit. We don't depend on rain that comes and goes (circumstances); we have a constant source of joy in Jesus by His Spirit. Through droughts and storms, we have a spring that does not fail.

**Q: In what ways is Jesus like water? How have you experienced your spiritual thirst being quenched by Him? How have you experienced abundant life and flourishing?**

**Q: How would our world be different if people repented and turned to Jesus?**

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### **Took**

**Main Point: Yahweh alone is God; all other “gods” are nothing.**

Elijah’s question from Mount Carmel still echoes today: “How long will you go limping between two opinions?” The people wanted Yahweh and Baal. Cultural approval and faithfulness to Yahweh. But when the fire came, it exposed the illusion. There were never two real options. There was only one true God.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “If He [Christ] be something he must be everything, and if He be not everything he is nothing to you.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus does not compete for a percentage of your heart. Divided loyalty always feels safer in the moment – but it leaves us spiritually dry. So the question is whether He is your God alone or have false gods like success, wealth or popularity secured a part of your heart? Ask the Lord to reveal any areas of divided loyalty in your heart. Confess them, turn from them, and thank Him for His unfailing faithfulness.

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Think about the ways the false “gods” of the world have disappointed you, not lived up to their promises, left you unsatisfied. Why do people put their trust in them? Why do they think that will give them success, prosperity or abundance? What does this tell us about how we define a successful, prosperous or abundant life? How does God define a successful life? A prosperous life? An abundant life? How is that different from what the world promises?

**PRAY:** Pray for those in our world who need to turn back to God. Pray for those who have divided loyalties between God and other “gods” in their life. Pray that your own heart would not be divided between God and anything else. Pray for a singular focus, worshipping and trusting in God alone.

**ACT:** Destroy your “idols.” Write on a piece of paper anything that is tempting to become an idol for you, something you are tempted to put before God or trust in more than Him. Then destroy the piece of paper as you pray to give up those idols and commit to God alone. Note: Some things you may need to give up completely if they are sinful, others you may need to simply submit to the lordship of Christ in your life.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://alicenter.org/roadwork-to-the-rumble/>

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<sup>2</sup> The oblation offering was offered at dawn and dusk.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/christ-is-all/#flipbook/>