

The Prophet of God Elijah Against the Prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Ki 18:17-40)

King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel allowed the gods of his wife Jezebel, Baal and Baal's consort Asherah, to be worshiped. These pagan gods were not real nor alive and were simply figures made of wood. Queen Jezebel's prophets encouraged the worship of Baal and Asherah, and many people believed the gods to be real. And during this time, Jezebel was killing off the prophets of God. Who should the people of the northern kingdom of Israel worship?

17) When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, the one ruining Israel?"

18) He replied, "I have not ruined Israel, but you and your father's family have, because you have abandoned the LORD's commands and followed the Baals. 19) Now summon all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table."

20) So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. 21) Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.

22) Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23) Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. 24) Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The God who answers with fire, he is God."

All the people answered, "That's fine." (1 Ki 18:17-24, CSB)

1. Why did the Israelites have difficulty in believing God?

25) Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire."

26) So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

27) At noon Elijah mocked them. He said, "Shout loudly, for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up!" 28) They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. 29) All afternoon they kept on raving until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention. (1 Ki 18:25-29, CSB)

2. Why was the contest between Elijah against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah public?

30) Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near me." So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the LORD's altar that had been torn down: 31) Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel will be your name"— 32) and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. 33) Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood." 34) Then he said, "A second time!" and they did it a second time. And then he said, "A third time!" and they did it a third time. 35) So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water.

36) At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things. 37) Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back."

38) Then the LORD's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39) When all the people saw it, they fell face down and said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"

40) Then Elijah ordered them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let even one of them escape." So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon and slaughtered them there. 41) Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a rainstorm." (1 Ki 18:30-41, CSB)

3. Amid the severe famine and drought in Samaria, did Elijah decide to set up this challenge on his own?

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Teacher Notes

Video Abstract (Author: Max7.org): This video shows the story of God speaking through and working through His prophet, Elijah. From King Ahab's condemnation of Elijah as troublemaker, to God's mighty show of power to answer prayer, as He sends fire that consumes the whole sacrifice, wood, stones and water - God is the focus of Elijah's story. God can answer prayer, not Baal. The LORD is the true God. This animation is suitable for ages 6 and up. Although this story has violent references in the words, the video does not portray the violence.

King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel allowed the gods of his wife Jezebel, Baal and Baal's consort Asherah, to be worshiped. These pagan gods were not real nor alive and were simply figures made of wood. Queen Jezebel's prophets encouraged the worship of Baal and Asherah, and many people believed the gods to be real. And during this time, Jezebel was killing off the prophets of God. Who should the people of the northern kingdom of Israel worship?

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1. Why did the Israelites have difficulty in believing God?

Ask the student: what did king Ahab allow his wife Jezebel to do to discourage the worship of God?

Queen Jezebel authorized the killing of the prophets of God to encourage only the worship of Baal and Asherah.

Unless parents taught their children about God, then the next generation would not know anything about the God in the Bible.

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2. Why was the contest between Elijah against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah public?

Ask the student: what does the title God represent? What is the purpose for a public show?

God is a title reserved for a living Being who is all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere at the same time.

A public show displays the stark difference between dead pagan gods who can do nothing against the living God who can do supernatural things.

The Israelites can determine which god / God is deserving of worship, and which prophets are true or deceitful.

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36) At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, “**LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things.** 37) Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back.”

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3. Amid the severe famine and drought in Samaria, did Elijah decide to set up this challenge on his own?

Ask the student: did Elijah do this on his own? Help the student learn to carefully observe the passage. Place an emphasis on what Elijah says in verse 36.

“At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things.”

This introduces the student to the skill of observation to look for details that can help him find answers to questions he may have with the text.