

Proven
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1 Kings 18:25-39

Opening: What are some of the toughest questions asked on a job interview?
What does the interviewer really need to know?

The point: The God of the universe has no obligation to prove his power and faithfulness to the frail, doubting humans He has created and yet, He has chosen time and again to reveal Himself for Who He is, the only one true God.

Today's passage is about a time when God used His servant to challenge the nation of Israel to turn from idolatry and turn back to Him. For three years He got their attention with a severe famine in the land as punishment for worshipping false gods. In this familiar text we read how God orchestrated a showdown on Mount Carmel to call the question: *"How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!"*¹

Before we look at this text, some context: The bad guys in this story were evil and misguided King Ahab who ruled the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and his even more evil wife, Jezebel. "Jezebel's goal was to make Baalism Israel's official religion. To help make sure that happened, she slaughtered many prophets of God—but not all of them (18:4,13)."ⁱⁱ She had assembled her own collection of hundreds of false prophets, 450 prophets of the male god [Baal] and 400 of the female goddess Asherah. The protagonist of the story is God's prophet Elijah who Ahab called the "troublemaker" in Israel. The trouble for Ahab and Jezebel was about to come to a dramatic climax on Mount Carmel.

Ahab assembled the 850 false prophets to meet Elijah's challenge. A huge crowd of spectators was on hand to witness this trial by fire as Elijah cried out...

23 Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. **24** Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed. **25** Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood." **26** So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime [six hours], shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made. [Now, Elijah begins to have some fun at their expense] **27** About noontime

Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!” **28** So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. **29** They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

- We live in a world that says, “*It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.*” You can’t say the prophets of Baal were not sincere or passionate in their misguided beliefs but there was literally “no reply.”
- Remember, this was a public spectacle with a “live audience.” At this point what do you imagine the spectators observing this display were thinking?
- The false prophets were too far-gone and damned to destruction (v.40) but the people of Israel were watching for proof. “Who IS the true God?”
- Many are like that today. They’ve been “sold a bill of goods” by Satan’s false prophets then they reach a point where the idolatry results in hollow, empty, silence. That’s when their hearts begin to soften and look to God.

1 Kings 18:30–35 (NLT) — 30 Then Elijah called to the people, “Come over here!” They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. **31** He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, **32** and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the Lord. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. **33** He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood.” **34** After they had done this, he said, “Do the same thing again!” And when they were finished, he said, “Now do it a third time!” So they did as he said, **35** and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

- The drama was high. Elijah had made the challenge more challenging by literally pouring water on the chances that God would show up with fire.
- This took a lot of confidence in God. Elijah had the benefit of having experienced God’s power, provision, and faithfulness during the prior three years when he was hiding for his life. At a brook in Kerith God used ravens to feed him. In Zarephath, God miraculously provided for a widow, her son, and Elijah. He not only gave food in the famine, God demonstrated His power through resurrection.
- Elijah had good reasons to be confident on Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:36–39 (NLT) — 36 At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. **37** O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”

- Up to this point Elijah had been bold. What was different about his prayer?
- I'll bet Elijah had been silently praying about this moment since God told him to orchestrate the contest, but this was a public prayer. Why?
- Remember Jesus' prayer when He raised Lazarus? *"Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me."*ⁱⁱⁱ
- The Explore the Bible Commentary states: *"God answers the humble prayers of His servants. Elijah wasn't doing what he did to get attention and fame. Rather, he wanted the glory to go to God."*^{iv}
- There is a lesson for Christ-followers when we face a challenge before the watching eyes of unbelievers. How can we humbly glorify God?
- When unbelievers observe how God has proven his love and power in the challenging times for His followers, it gets their attention. Giving Him the credit and glory allows Him to use our situation to reach others for Him.
- For six hours Baal never answered. God didn't even take six seconds!

38 Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! **39** And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!"

- The crowd saw a dramatic display of the difference between false idols and the one true God. The altar of Baal stood untouched as evidence that there is no power in idols. When they viewed the smoldering altar of God their softened hearts burst into flame with belief. *"Yes, the Lord IS God!"*
- The God of the universe has no obligation to prove his power and faithfulness to frail, doubting humans, but in His kindness and grace He will reveal Himself as the only one true God so we might BELIEVE.
- What happened to the false prophets? On God's command they were slain. What about the famine? God brought rain to Israel. What happened to Elijah? Jezebel took out a "hit" on him and he ran for his life. He was bold and confident on Mount Carmel but his human fears would emerge again after the victory. That's next week's lesson.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The main lesson of this familiar story is what I just stated: God proves His power and love so that hardened hearts can be softened and believe.
- Something else got my attention from the words of Elijah's humble prayer: *"Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God..."*
- James wrote: *...The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. [Then James said,]¹⁷ Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!¹⁸ Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.*^v
- Elijah was no super saint (just read the next chapter!) but he knew how to fervently pray that God would reveal Himself for our good and His glory.

- Think of the opportunities we have to ask God to show Himself powerful, faithful, and loving not only for our sake but also for the sake of others.
- *“Lord, please reveal Yourself to my children and grandchildren.”*
- *“Lord, please reveal Yourself to my friend with a health challenge.”*
- *“Lord, please reveal Yourself within our church during a difficult time.”*
- *“Lord, please reveal Yourself in our country where chaos seems to reign.”*
- *“Lord, please reveal Yourself to those around us who are lost without you and trusting in earthly idols. Help them to see the contrast between the emptiness of idols and the dramatic power that comes only from You.”*
- *“Lord, reveal Yourself to those who are deceived by false religions and cults. Open their eyes to the error in their beliefs.”*
- *“Lord, answer me so all will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you desire to bring people to Yourself. Do it for YOUR GLORY, Lord.”*
- I don’t recommend we go to the town square and try to call down fire.
- There was enormous power in the blast of fire on that altar, but the REAL power is when we humbly ask God to reveal Himself in order to bring people to Himself for our eternal good and His eternal glory.

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (1 Ki 18:21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Lifeway Explore the Bible Leader Guide 2022

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jn 11:41–42). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{iv} Lifeway Explore the Bible Commentary 2022

^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jas 5:16–18). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.