

1st Kings Chapter 18 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "How to be used by God to make a difference for Him". One thing that most of us want in life is to have our lives have meaning. Most people want to look back at their life and say, "I made a difference". Some are raised up to positions of great power and influence. Most of us live in relative obscurity as far as public recognition. However, I believe God looks at us differently. I hold this strange view that when die, the two questions God has for us are, "Do you believe my Son Jesus is God and He paid the price for all of your sins? The second question is then, "If you said yes to Question #1, what have you done about it? How have you lived your life to make a difference based on that belief? That idea is what inspires me to write these lessons and hopefully inspires you to use your life to make a difference for Him with your own life.
2. With that said, we are about to read of a prophet named Elijah who made the decision to use his life to make a difference for God. To begin that witness for God, He had him confront the king of Israel in the last chapter to tell that king the great mistake the king made by turning from God in order to worship a false god who we call Baal. However, God was not through with Elijah after he delivered that message. Then God humbled Elijah and taught him how to trust God through some pretty tough circumstances in order to build up his faith in God. Elijah has to go hide out in a remote place and trust God to literally bring him food daily. When the water source at that place ended, God then had Elijah travel north of Israel to have a desolate woman take care of him in a town that was essentially the home of Baal worship. While there God miraculously provided food for this widow and Elijah. Then Elijah did a miracle that was never performed by anyone to that point in history: Elijah raised someone up from the dead, the only son of that widow. All of that is essentially the last chapter of this book. If that was all there is to tell about Elijah, it would be an impressive story. However, God still has plans to use Elijah in even a greater way, and that is the story of Chapter 18, which is this lesson.
 - a) OK John good for Elijah who lived roughly 3,000 years ago. I'm glad God did use him in a mighty way. However, what does that have to do with you and me? The point is just as God used Elijah, so God can and does use ordinary people like us to make a difference for Him in our own world. While you and I may not be called to be a witness to a king, what is just as important is to be a witness to people living around us. I can't think of a purpose for living life greater than to be used by the God of the Universe for His glory. That's what we are to learn from Elijah, not the specific miracles but the idea of using our time and our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - b) Suppose you say, "OK, I go to church pretty regularly, I pray regularly and I get involved in some projects at my local church." That's wonderful and maybe that is how He is using you to make a difference for Him. The secret to me is to pray, "Dear God my time belongs to You. Help me to use my time to make a difference for You in all that I do. Help me to realize the most valuable thing I own is my time and use it for Your glory". I've found out that God can't resist a prayer like that, because we put our lives in His hand. Then He can and does use our lives for His glory. While we may not be brought as low as Elijah, I find that whoever God uses, He disciplines and brings low so we can trust Him more with our lives. That is what God does with Elijah here and that is what God wants to do with us as well. Therefore, let us read how God uses Elijah so we can learn how we too can be used by Him with our own lives.
3. With all that said, this chapter focuses in Elijah confronting King Ahab a second time and results of that confrontation. The difference between trip #1 to the King and trip #2 is now Elijah trusts in God far more as he understands how to depend upon God for every aspect of his life. He has performed two incredible miracles outside of the land of Israel and now that he has learned how to be dependant upon God, he's ready to be used in even a greater way than he has so far.

4. Now we are ready to study, in my opinion one of the greatest overlooked stories in the bible: Elijah's confrontation with King Ahab and a literal challenge to the death against the false god Baal in front of the entire northern nation of Israel. For those of you with some familiarity with this story, hopefully I'll teach you a few new insights. For those not familiar with this story, my goal is not for you to learn ancient Jewish history, but to learn from Elijah how we can trust God more with our lives so that He can use us to make a difference for Him in our own world.
5. With that said, Chapter 18, Verse 1: After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." ² So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.
 - a) To explain where we are in the story, we need to back track a little and explain where we left off. To make it simple, Elijah was living north of Israel in a town that is today part of the country of Lebanon. Elijah performed two great miracles here. First, he miraculously provided food and oil for a desolate (think very poor) woman and her only son to live on while Elijah lived with her. By the way, he lived upstairs on a rooftop-covered patio. She was not Jewish and lived where the worship of the false god that the Israelites started to worship was common. The second great miracle that Elijah performed there was that he raised her son up (probably a small boy) from the dead. It is the first time in the bible where a story is recorded of someone being raised from the dead. After that, the widow believed in Elijah's God. There, I just summarized Chapter 17 in one paragraph.
 - b) All of that leads to Chapter 18. You have to think that Elijah is in a pretty good mood by this point in the story. He performed two outstanding miracles. He started Chapter 17 by telling the King of Northern Israel named Ahab, there would be no rain in Israel until God says otherwise. God has kept Elijah alive through some pretty amazing miracles. Now at this point in the story. God somehow tells Elijah to go visit Ahab and say, "The over three year long drought is about to finally end". Understand that King Ahab blames Elijah for this drought and not the fact that Ahab lead and required the Israelites to worship a false god named Baal. We'll discover later in the chapter that Ahab searched far and wide to try to find Elijah and there was a death sentence on his head. I picture "Wanted dead or alive posters" of Elijah all over Israel.
 - i) With all of that background in mind, Elijah is told, "Go live in Israel again and tell the king the drought is about to end". I guarantee that if it wasn't for Elijah's trust in God so far, he'd probably be too scared to go back to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, let alone confront the king himself. Yet, God has built up Elijah's faith to a point where Elijah is thinking, "OK, God this is what You want me to do next, I'm now on my way." We don't read of him packing or saying goodbye to the widow, which is a logical assumption after all the good he did there. Next we will read of how the confrontation with King Ahab actually occurs.
 - c) Before I get to that, stop and consider how news like this would affect our lives. What if God tells us to drop what we are doing and go take on this project? Would we go? How do we know when God wants to use our lives anyway? The first step is a willingness to be submissive to His will. We do that by regular time in prayer and study of His will. I don't find that God gives us blunt messages anyway. It's more like, "Keep trusting that I am guiding your life, live to make a difference for Me, and when I need to guide you in a specific direction I will do so My way and on My timing. I don't find we get many direct messages from God as much as it is a desire to do something that makes a difference for Him with our lives. Once we commit to that desire, He does guide our lives.
 - i) To put it simply, we can't make a difference for God if we aren't willing to commit our lives to Him in the first place. If we do that and trust that He is guiding us, He does, His way and on His timing. If we are praying for Him to guide our lives for His glory and daily read His word and be willing to be with other believers, then He will guide our lives if we commit to trusting Him with our lives, period.

6. Meanwhile, Verse 2 (cont.): Now the famine was severe in Samaria, ³ and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. ⁴ While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)
- a) The story now switches from Elijah to King Ahab and his wife Queen Jezebel. She wasn't Jewish and a devout worshipper of the false god Baal. More on that deity in a bit.
 - b) Here in these verses we get introduced to a new character named Obadiah. So you know, that is not the same Obadiah that wrote the book of Obadiah. The other Obadiah did not come onto the scene until centuries later. The key point here is that Queen Jezebel hated the worship of God so much, that she had put to death any prophet of God and probably anyone that truly believed in God. Imagine trusting in God under those conditions.
 - i) With that said, Obadiah is a secret believer in God. He was the head of the king's palace. He also proved his faith in God by hiding 100 prophets of God in caves. Remember that this is a time of a severe drought. Yet Obadiah provided these men with food and water during that time frame. If you want an example of how to be used by God greatly, here is a good example. For all we know, Obadiah's reward in heaven may be as great as Elijah's or yours and mine, because he did what God called Him to do despite the fact he was in charge of King Ahab's palace.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment and discuss people who work for non-Christian businesses or bosses that are unbelievers. First, if that is where you believe God has called you to work or there are no other job opportunities available, be a good witness at that job. There is a verse in the New Testament where Paul prays for those of Caesar's household as stated in Philippians 4:2. When that was written, Nero was Caesar, emperor of the Roman Empire. Nero hated Christians and put many to death. Yet Paul prayed for believers who worked in his household and never told them to quit their jobs. My point is God can call us to be a witness in a place that is not God centered. That is what Obadiah had to do here and in his own way demonstrated his faith by hiding believers in God during a time when it was illegal to trust in God for one's survival. With that said, we're ready for Verse 5.
7. Verse 5: Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals." ⁶ So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.
- a) Meanwhile, King Ahab was concerned with finding water. It's now been over three years since Elijah has announced the drought. Therefore the king is focused on finding a source of food and water for his animals to stay alive. Remember that Obadiah was the head of his household. The logical but unstated assumption is that these men did not travel alone. They each had people with them out looking for water.
 - b) What fascinates me is what was not said. It's not like Ahab said, "I'm king of the Israelites. Maybe I should pray to God for more rain and repent of trusting in Baal to provide for the needs of me, my household and my country?" After all, the deity Baal promises rain if we trust in him. Now it's been over three years and he hasn't come through for us. Maybe its time to trust in God for a while to see what happens. Like most husbands, I suspect Ahab wanted to please his wife, so he probably thought, "She's got the religion thing covered, so I'll go do something practical and see if I can find food for our animals during this time."
 - c) Bottom line is King Ahab and Obadiah split up to go search the land for patches of grass so that the animals have something to feed upon.
8. Verse 7: As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?"
- a) While Obadiah was out scouting for grass, all of a sudden he sees and recognizes Elijah.
 - b) There is an old bible saying that "coincidence" is not in the bible. A coincidence is when God is working in the background of our lives to make a difference for Him.

- c) Remember that God told Elijah to go find the king. Elijah was walking or maybe on the back of an animal and all of a sudden Obadiah recognizes him. I don't know if Obadiah is alone at that particular moment, but I assume so based on the text.
 - d) At this point, let me discuss the word "lord" in lower case. The term "lord" usually refers in the bible to one who is in charge of one's life. It was common for Israelites to refer to the king as "lord". It doesn't mean Israelites thought of kings as God, but just someone who at that moment is over them. It could refer to a parent or a boss at work. It can also be used as a greeting of respect. For Obadiah to call Elijah lord here simply means that he respects Elijah as a fellow believer in God in a world where trust in God was illegal and a death sentence.
 - i) I am guessing that Elijah himself was still a little scared. Despite the miracles that he performed, he is now traveling through territory where he is a wanted man. I am guessing that as he traveled to Israel he was thinking, would I make it alive to see the king or would I be killed before I got there? Yes God did tell me to deliver this message to the king still I'm nervous that I heard the message right.
 - ii) The point is God here in effect reassured Elijah by first bringing him to another person who also believed in God again in a country where the worship of God was illegal. My point is I find that God leads us in steps to trust Him more and will not give us orders to follow that are too difficult for us to handle at any given moment in time. Here Elijah encounters a fellow believer before he has to make any sort of public appearance to the king himself. That had to reassure him of his mission in the first place.
 - iii) The text also implies in this verse and next one that Elijah knew who Obadiah was.
9. Verse 8: "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, `Elijah is here.' "
- a) One has to understand the fear that Obadiah must have at this point in the story. He has risked his own life by hiding 100 prophets of God and secretly bringing them food and water during this drought. Obadiah knows that there is a death sentence upon Elijah and it would be a risk to his own life just to tell the king that he has found Elijah. To put all of this thought another way, Obadiah legitimately feared the king saying, "Why didn't you kill Elijah when you had the chance? Why are you telling me you spotted him all alone?"
 - b) In the meantime, we don't see any fear in Elijah. He is emboldened by how God has used him so far. By God humbling Elijah the way he did in the previous chapter, Elijah at this point just blurts out in effect, "Go tell the king I'm here and don't worry about your life."
10. Verse 9: "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? ¹⁰ As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. ¹¹ But now you tell me to go to my master and say, `Elijah is here.' ¹² I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth. ¹³ Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. ¹⁴ And now you tell me to go to my master and say, `Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"
- a) The short version here is instead of Obadiah just running to tell the king that he has found Elijah, he stops to express his fears to Elijah. Besides giving us some of the background to this story, it is a good example of how to deal with fears: Express them to another person who also fears God so that together we can pray our way through those fears. I can't tell you enough how grateful I am for my wife who has comforted me through my own fears at times in our history together.
 - b) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, just know that having someone to express our fears to, can help us to relieve our fears and trust God more through a tough situation.

- c) Meanwhile, it's time to discuss the details of what Obadiah is saying here in these verses.
 - i) The key point is Obadiah is saying, "Elijah you don't realize what you are asking me to do here. The king has searched far and wide for you. He has made leaders of other countries swear they haven't seen you. There are "wanted dead or alive" posters of you everywhere. (OK, that is speculation on my point.) What the text does say is that the queen has put to death anyone who claims to be a prophet of God probably because she assumes those people are helping you, Elijah to hide.
 - ii) If all of that is not bad enough, Obadiah hid 100 true prophets of God in order to keep them alive during that famine. He said he has served God since childhood. If the king or the queen starts asking questions about his meeting with Elijah, then they'll start to torture me (Obadiah) to ask about his relationship with God, Elijah or anyone else who trusts in God. Bottom line is Obadiah fears for his life and he is afraid to tell the king that he has spotted Elijah.
- d) Now that Obadiah has poured out his fears to Elijah, we read his response in Verse 15.
 - 11. Verse 15: Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."
 - a) Remember how I said that God never makes us do things we are too afraid to do? Here Elijah tells Obadiah that he will show himself alive to the king and you don't have to fear for your own life. This is Elijah reassuring Obadiah that it is God's will for Elijah to go see the king. Therefore, whether or not Obadiah lives or dies, God's will is being done.
 - i) That is the type of attitude and boldness we need as Christians. Life is not about how long we get to live. Life is about using our time to make a difference for God and doing what He commands us to do. What I have found is when we trust in Him through our fears the situation always works out better than it does if we try to solve problems based on our own desires.
 - ii) Let me give an illustration: Let's say the right thing to do is to confront someone on a bad situation. We know that that confrontation will be painful, but we also know it's the right thing to do. That's when we ask God to help us through that particular situation. I find that God gives us the boldness to do what we have too much fear to do on our own. That's why as a Christian it is important to pray for "boldness" as God then gives us the boldness to handle those confrontations.
 - iii) In effect that is what Elijah is doing here. He is telling Obadiah, "Hey, do we serve God or not? God told me to confront the king on this issue. Therefore, it does not matter what you say to the king because God wants me to tell him "face to face" so God will make that possible. Therefore are you Obadiah going to help me or not?"
 - 12. Verse 16: So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"
 - a) Before we discuss the confrontation between King Ahab and Elijah, notice that it appears that nothing bad happened to Obadiah. He didn't die for delivering that message. That means Obadiah delivered that message and we don't read "off with your head" or of any similar type of ending to Obadiah's life. God gave Obadiah the boldness to work through his fears and do God's will and we don't read anything negative happening to him. That is a good illustration of how to be used by God and a good model for our own lives.
 - b) Meanwhile, it is time to get back to the central character of the book – Elijah. Remember that God told Elijah to go confront the king face to face and tell him in effect, "God has proved His point about who is really God by not making it rain in Israel for over the last three years, despite one logically assumes all the prayers made to the false god Baal for rain during that time period.
 - c) With that said, all the king could say is, "is that you, the troubler of Israel"?
 - 13. Verse 18: "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. ¹⁹ Now summon

the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

- a) Elijah's response is in effect, "Don't try to blame this on me. You the king are the one who refuses to trust in the God of the Israelites let alone the God of the whole world. There is no rain simply because you King Ahab refused to trust in God. I (Elijah) am just a humble servant of God sent to you to give you the message of what is His punishment for turning from Him."
- b) Just to emphasize the point that King Ahab has turned from God, Elijah mentions the fact that his wife has 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah dine at her table. That just means they hold a position of power with the queen and minister to her. One can just imagine all of those false prophets saying, "Baal is testing to see if we trust him. We have to keep praying to him and eventually he has to bring us rain."
- c) I should pause here for a moment and explain a little more about the false god Baal, and also explain who is Asherah. In the last lesson when I first explained who Baal is, I said it is actually a little more complicated than just an entity called "Baal". Now let me explain it further: Baal is a false god that appeals to the intellect as one may think it is logical to put trust in a god to provide for good weather. Therefore, we have to perform rituals in order to please Baal. Asherah is a false female goddess associated with Baal, that appeals to the emotions. That's why Baal has to be turned on by sexual imagery through Asherah. At that time in Israel they made sexual images of Asherah, which is translated "groves" in the King James. All of this comes down to appealing to this god couple to help people so the land and those who worship this couple are productive (i.e., rain, or having children).
- d) With all of that in mind, let's get back to these verses. Notice that Elijah was well aware of how this king and queen lived. He knew that the queen dined with 450 prophets of Baal and another 400 prophets for Asherah. Elijah knew that the king and queen of Israel had abandoned God and forced the Israelites to worship this dual deity. With that said, notice Elijah's first words to the King was in effect, "I'm not the one making trouble for Israel by a lack of rain, but you are your highness." Elijah is effectively telling the king you forgot that you are not in charge of God's people but God is. As a leader of God's chosen people you can't turn your back on Him and expect to get away with it. To put it simply, King Ahab, it's your fault there is no rain, not mine (Elijah's).
- e) Next Elijah says in effect, "OK your highness let's find out for sure who is really God". It's one thing for me to claim that who I call God is God and it's another to put my money and my time where my mouth is. (That alone is a good lesson for you and me). Therefore let's put the two gods to a test. Let's call all of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to Mount Carmel and we'll have a contest to see just who is really God. Oh, and bring those 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah along while you're at it.
- f) OK, time for another quick side lecture on Mt. Carmel. This mountain is by the ocean and that will be significant coming up. It was also a central worship spot for Baal, so Elijah is saying in effect, "I'll give you home court advantage in this contest I'm about to set up."
 - i) Now for a quick story I want to sneak into this lesson. My last name Karmelich is based effectively on Mount Carmel. Roughly 400 years ago, there was a Catholic missionary group called the "Mount Carmel Order" that came to the islands off of what today is called Croatia and witnessed to the people living there. In Croatian, an "ich" at the end of one's name means "son of". It's kind of like Russian, where a "ski" ending means "son of". Therefore my last name is means "Son of Carmel". In Croatian the "hard c" sound is spelled with a K. Therefore my last name is in effect "Son of Karmel". Now that you know that, and I snuck it into the lesson, let's get back to Elijah and his battle with this king of North Israel.

14. Verse 20: So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.
- a) If you read my last lesson on Elijah, I stated that the main purpose of his ministry was to lead people back to God. That is why John the Baptist had a similar ministry to Elijah and Jesus said in effect if we are willing to accept it, John is the Second Coming of Elijah even though John denied that he was that second coming. (See Matthew 11:14 and John 1:21.) Therefore, Elijah himself will appear again at Jesus Second Coming which is a topic if one is studying Revelation Chapter 11 and as predicted in the Old Testament book of Malachi.
 - b) The point is we have a time gap between Verses 19 and 20. In that time gap, the king gave the command for everyone living in Northern Israel to come to Mount Carmel for this big contest between God Himself and Baal. When this crowd gathered, Elijah, who now has the courage to boldly ask, "So are you Israelites going to follow Baal or God? Who are all of you going to trust in for rain, let alone your whole lives?" The last part of Verse 21 says "the people said nothing".
 - c) What I suspect is the crowd thought, "We haven't had rain here for over three years. We are not that impressed with either one right now due to the drought. However, we are willing to watch this contest and see who is really God. In other words, their silence was saying to Elijah, "OK, we're all here, let's get on with the contest."
15. Verse 22: Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire--he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."
- a) The first thing Elijah says is he is the only living prophet for Northern Israel at this time. If you recall, Elijah was told that the head of the king's house had hid 100 prophets so that the queen would not kill them. Elijah is in effect lying here to protect their lives. So is it ok to lie in some situations? The answer is we may have to pay the consequences here on earth for that lie, but God allows it here for a greater good. A simple example would be hiding a spy for one's country and lying about the whereabouts to keep them alive.
 - b) So after Elijah makes the statement that he is the only living prophet in the neighborhood, then he says, but there are 450 prophets of Baal here at this gathering. Then Elijah says in effect, "I've got an idea. Let's have a contest to see who is really god. All 450 of them can offer up a bull (think ox) to Baal and I'll offer up a bull to God. Both of us will cut up our bulls in pieces and lay them on wood, but not light them on fire. Then we'll see which of the gods will come down "by fire" and accept the sacrifice. The last part of Verse 24 says in effect, "Good idea Elijah, we'll go along with that contest and see who wins".
 - c) This leads to a really good question: Can we put God to the test? Suppose God in some way showed Himself to the whole world at once, would people turn to Him with their lives? I suspect they would for a while, but then they're not interested in changing their lifestyle and will make excuses. They will say it is "Allah" or "Buddha" in other parts of the world. That's why God gives us Christians the privilege of leading others to Him at the rate of one or a few at a time. It is realization of His existence and realization of the truth of the Gospel message that leads others to Him, not a magic show or the way that we give the message to others.
 - d) That leads me back to Elijah. Was it proper for him to put on this show? Yes, because it was a step to lead people back to God. It was a way to demonstrate publicly for people to follow God and not false deities. Think of it this way: If people aren't willing to open the bible today to find out about Him, why should God put on a big show to demonstrate to others who He is if we don't believe "Moses and the Prophets?" OK, back to the show:

- e) I just thought of one final comment on this topic. I stated in the last lesson that God will often do His greatest miracles to nonbelievers through missionaries (you and me) in order for people to take the first step to trust God. That in effect is what we are seeing here and what still happens today around the world to lead nonbelievers to God in the first place.
- i) OK, enough of all of that, back to Elijah and the big show:
16. Verse 25: Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire."²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it.
- a) Think of the challenge that Elijah is making as a sporting contest. Elijah is saying to those prophets of Baal in effect, "I'll give you home court advantage. Since you associate Mount Carmel with Baal worship, you pick which bull to sacrifice and I'll pick second. Then we will each set up an altar to our chosen God and see which deity accepts the offering. All I ask of you prophets is that you don't light your bull on fire. Let's see which deity accepts the sacrifice by lighting the chopped up, dead animal on fire."
- b) Therefore, the 450 prophets of Baal who wanted to show once and for all that he is god accepted the challenge and placed their ox on their altar.
17. Verse 26 (cont.): Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.
- a) What is happening here is the prophets of Baal put on a big show for this large crowd that was gathered on this mountain to watch the contest between the two deities. I admit that if I was one of those prophets I would be tempted to drop an existing stick of fire on that offering just to get it to go. That is why it was necessary for Elijah to watch this ritual very carefully to make sure these prophets didn't cheat. I'm sure these prophets put on a big show for the crowd and danced for hours around the offering.
- b) Let me finish the rest of this story and then we can discuss the issue about whether or not we should set up our own tests for God when we encounter people of different religions.
18. Verse 27: At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.
- a) I have to admit, Verse 27 is my favorite in the chapter. The priests of Baal have now been doing their ritual for hours with nothing happening. Elijah starts to taunt them. The idea in Hebrew of Elijah's taunts are in effect, "Maybe he is sleeping, or maybe he is busy going to the bathroom at this moment, or maybe he's traveling at this moment". I think Elijah's trust in God is so strong at this point he doesn't fear the king or queen wanting him dead. Elijah is taunting the false prophets out loud to make his point to the crowd.
- b) In Verse 28, the false prophets started to cut themselves to show their loyalty to Baal. This was a custom in false religions at that time. In fact, children were offered as sacrifices to show their trust in this god. That is back in Genesis, when Abraham was told by God to offer Isaac, in effect, God was asking Abraham to do what the false religions were asking their believers to do. Because Abraham trusted in God as much as these Baal worshippers trusted in their god, Abraham's son was spared of that sacrifice.
- c) By Verse 29, we get the impression that these false prophets were now at it, all day long and the crowd was getting bored. Verse 29 says that because there was no response from Baal to all of this dancing and bleeding, the crowd didn't pay attention to them anymore.
- d) OK John, all of this is wonderful ancient history and a cute story. Why should we care? Can we go make fun of other people's religion? That would only make us a bad witness for Jesus. Let me show how Elijah does his sacrifice and then I'll talk about that issue.

19. Verse 30: Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins.³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel."³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed.³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."
- a) Now it is Elijah's turn to offer his sacrifice to God. Remember that this was an organized event by the king, so Elijah had time to prepare what material he needed for this event. Think of the 450 prophets of Baal is center stage. Now Elijah yells out to this large crowd, look over here at this smaller stage. I'm going to put on my own little show and you will see God react to my sacrifice without all the dancing and bleeding.
 - b) Know that it's now been about 500 years since the Israelites lived in this land. Apparently at one time, there was an altar to God made up on this mountain. That is the reference to the broken altar in Verse 30. As I said, Elijah had time to get what he needed in order to do his own sacrifice to God. Elijah then got 12 stones. I assume they were big rocks that he could carry that the crowd could see. Remember that Israel split into two kingdoms at this time: The territory of 10 of the 12 tribes was the Northern Kingdom and the territory of the last two tribes was the Southern Kingdom. My point is Elijah picked 12 stones and not 10 stones for this demonstration up North. It is Elijah's way of stating that God chose the 12 tribes of Israel to follow Him. In fact in Verse 31, the father of the twelve tribes is named here (Jacob) and Elijah also states the new name that God gave Jacob, which is the name "Israel" here in that verse. It is a reminder to the crowd who they belong to.
 - i) The point as it applies to you and me is that God has separated us just as He has separated these 12 tribes of Israel. How do we know God has called us? Easy, if we dedicated our lives to God, we have been called, period. End of that issue.
 - ii) Elijah is saying in effect to us, if we do call ourselves Christians, act like it. Stop wasting our time pursuing things that don't matter for eternity. I'm not saying we can't have hobbies or times of rest. I'm saying that if we do believe Jesus is God, we should be living our lives accordingly. That's not what the Israelites are doing here at this point in their history. OK, back to the story.
 - c) After Elijah laid out 12 large stones to form an altar, he dug a big trench around it. The trench was large enough to hold "two seahs of seed" whatever that is. I didn't look up how big that was, but I suspect it was big enough that it could be seen from a ways away. Elijah then arranged some wood on the rocks to offer up a sacrifice. Then he cut up the ox and placed it on the fire. I picture the crowd who was now bored at watching the dancing prophets of Baal look to see Elijah making all of his efforts to see what will happen.
 - d) The last thing Elijah did was give himself a handicap. He ordered that four large barrels of water be poured over the sacrifice so he couldn't easily secretly light it on fire.
 - i) The logical question everyone has is, "If this is a drought, where did Elijah get the water to pour on the sacrifice?" Most commentators logically speculate that this is ocean water. Mount Carmel is near the Mediterranean Sea. As I stated, Elijah had the time to prepare for this event and brought four barrels of sea water up there. I don't know if he did this alone or the "100 hidden prophets of God" helped him.
 - e) I want to pause for a moment and get "Jewish": Remember the Northern Kingdom hadn't worshipping God in it's half a century or more history. Yet Elijah was thinking in terms of the "evening sacrifice" as stated in Verse 29. The point is at God's temple in Jerusalem priests were required to offer a sacrifice twice a day for their own sins and the sins of the nation of Israel. It was at the time of the evening sacrifice that Elijah was thinking, "Hey God, even though I am a sinful man, I offer up this animal as a substitute for my own sins and I want you to accept it." (This is based on Numbers 28:4).

- i) OK John, as you like to say, so what? Consider the seawater that was poured out on the animal. Another requirement of the sacrifice is that it had to be mixed with salt in order to be accepted. (See Leviticus 2:13 as an example.) OK John, again, so what? So Elijah did this offering as God ordained. We as Christians trust in Jesus as our eternal sacrifice so we don't do this ritual. Elijah wanted to show the Jewish people living in Northern Israel that God still wanted them to worship Him as He has ordained them to do so. So he does a very Jewish compliant ritual. The point for you and me is that we should never take Jesus sacrifice for us lightly. The only reason we can approach God the Father is because He is our eternal sacrifice for the sins we are and are not even aware of. That leads me back to salt. Salt is used as a preservative. It symbolizes God preserving His sacrifice on our behalf.
- f) With that ritual out of my system, time to get back to the big contest. Elijah tells someone around him to pour out the water on his sacrifice so that it won't burn very easily.
20. Verse 34: "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time.³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.
- a) Personally, I can even see some of the Baal prophets helping Elijah at this point. It is like they are thinking, "If this guy wants to handicap his chances, we'll help him to do so." That's why we get a wonderful word picture here of Elijah's offering soaked in water.
- b) Next as they say in Hollywood, "It's show time": Everything was preparation to now.
21. Verse 36: At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command."³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.
- a) Remember that God is never under any obligation to answer our prayers. Elijah is aware of that and I suspect he prays like there is no tomorrow. Personally, I don't think it was the specific words that Elijah prayed as much as it was his sincerity and true trust in God that made God respond at this point in history. Notice that Elijah had no interest in any glory for himself, but only for God. The prayer is in effect, "Many people that You God have called to worship You are present here. Accept this offering not because You have to show Yourself, but just as sign that You are real."
- b) To state the obvious of Verse 38, God responded. Not only was the very wet, dead, cut up animal burned and completely gone, but also the wood, the stones, the water and the soil. Like I said, it's show time. The good news is it worked as we'll see in the next verse.
22. Verse 39: When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"
- a) Remember that we have a country that has abandoned God. The large crowd of Israelites saw this miracle happened. They fell on their knees and cried out The LORD--he is God!
- b) You know, some scenes in the bible don't require a lot of commentary as they just sort of speak for themselves. Here is one of them.
23. Verse 40: Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.
- a) I stated back in the introduction that this was a death match. If God did not respond to Elijah, the king and queen would have him killed, so in effect God saved Elijah's life just as He did when He had birds bring him food in the last chapter.
- b) Now we read of Elijah killing the prophets of Baal. Elijah was no wimp. I suspect that the crowd helped Elijah at this point as they realized God was God. Therefore, people helped to point out who was Baal's prophets and gathered them together at a valley location and Elijah somehow killed them all. Like I said, there is a heavy price to turn from God.

- c) Now I want to get back to the issue of the effectiveness of this ritual. My short answer is it worked in the short run, but not in the long run. This demonstration does show that at times God can respond to our prayers for help especially if we are fully trusting in Him in order to guide us. At the same time, if one reads about the rest of the history of Northern Israel, they still turned away from God in a relatively short time period.
- i) That leads me back to a comment Jesus made about trusting in God. Jesus said, "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (From Luke 16:31.)
 - ii) My point here is that miracles help the faith of people who already believe, but I find they are not good by themselves to get people to change their lifestyles. We don't read of the king and queen repenting of their Baal worship here. The nation of North Israel does not turn to God despite this miracle.
 - iii) So if it didn't work, why did God allow it? For starters, it saved Elijah's life. Don't underestimate the importance of God caring for those who love Him. Next it was a public demonstration of His existence in a way that worked far greater than as I stated earlier, "Him just appearing across the sky for all to see". Finally, it gives a reason for those Israelites to not have an excuse to ignore Him.
 - iv) Let me put this in our language. For Americans who have easy access to the bible, there is no excuse one can make to God. When one can turn on the television or radio or the internet at any time and find lots of people preaching about Him, they can't use "we didn't know" as an excuse. For those living in more isolated settings that is why Jesus calls on us to be a witness for Him where we live and around the world. I'm still in shock by the fact I have people who read my studies in places where Christianity is illegal. I'm amazed by the boldness of those living in such places who risk their lives like Elijah in order to preach about Jesus to others.
- d) In the meantime, there are six more verses to go to this story, so let us read on.
24. Verse 41: And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.
- a) I admit, I find Verse 41 strange. Elijah doesn't tell the king to come pray with him for rain or to go worship God. Elijah says to the king, "go eat and drink" as rain is coming. Why?
 - i) Remember before this whole contest started, the king was worried about having any water for the animals. Now Elijah is telling the king, "Don't worry about all of that stuff. God is in charge and rain is coming, so go be a king".
 - ii) I admit, that sometimes I pray for what God wants me to do next, and essentially He says, "Go do what you want right now and I'll let you know if I need you." I think that in effect is the message to the king right here and now.
 - iii) I also suspect that the king watched the prophets of Baal versus Elijah show all day and hasn't eaten anything. This is Elijah's way of giving practical advice to the king that he will need his strength soon as the same God who accepted that sacrifice is about to make it rain.
 - b) So while King Ahab took Elijah's advice and stopped for dinner, Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel (only about 2,000 feet above sea level) and in effect prayed for rain.
 - c) Time for a quick explanation about how Elijah prayed. When a Jewish woman was about to give birth, they would squat with their heads between their knees. The point is Elijah got in a physical position where he could pray as if he was in pain. So didn't Elijah trust that God would keep His promise? Of course. However, Elijah still knew that his life is on the line and if it didn't rain soon, the king would say to him effectively, "OK, nice show with the whole sacrifice thing, but we still need rain here! Therefore, he got in a physical position that is associated with struggling hard to get a result (as if he is trying to deliver a baby) and prayed hard for rain to occur.

- d) So why did Elijah go to the mountaintop to do this? Maybe it was just a nearby spot to get away from the crowd. Maybe because Israelites associated mountaintop locations as being closer to God. Personally, I don't think the physical location of where Elijah was or even the position Elijah sat in as he prayed is nearly as important as his sincerity to ask the God of the Universe to do what Elijah requested.
- i) You may recall that Jesus said if we pray for this mountain to move, our will, will be done if it is God's will" (Matthew 21:21 or Mark 11:23). That is what Elijah is praying here: he is saying, God if this is Your will for rain here, let it be so. Elijah is begging God to act here. So can and should we pray that hard? Prayer is about His will to be done. Continuous prayer is about showing our commitment to Him. His answer to prayer is always about God working His way, on His timing. Rain didn't come just because Elijah prayed hard. The rain came because God wanted it to come at this time. So can we make it rain or stop raining? The answer is God wants us to seek His will. God loves to work through people to get His will done. It is His way of using us to demonstrate His power and His love for people.
- ii) So let's get back to the question of why God says no. Why does He allow horrible things to happen in this world? My favorite short answer is this world is cursed by sin and we are stuck here. To quote Jesus, "Weren't those 18 people who died in an accident when a tower fell on them, any worse sinners than others?" That is my paraphrase of Luke 13:4. The point is we are all going to die sometime, and we have to face that reality. We don't know how long we have to live, so we need to use our time to get right with God (trust in Jesus for the complete payment of our sins) and use our time to make that difference for Him. If you didn't catch that, I just referred to the opening paragraph of my lesson.
- iii) In the meantime, a few more verses to go.
25. Verse 43: "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."
- a) We last left Elijah still sitting on top of Mount Carmel praying for rain. Seven times he asks a servant (I suspect one of the men Obadiah hid in the caves) to look for rain. The way I picture this is Elijah was praying so hard, he wouldn't even look up in the sky to see if God answered his prayer yet. Give the servant credit for obeying Elijah each time.
26. Verse 44: The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"
- a) Here is Elijah building up the faith of his servant. The servant saw a little nothing of a cloud and Elijah said, "Big storm is coming. Go tell the king before the rain prevents you from finding him in the first place". Elijah wasn't trusting in his prayer ability. He was trusting in the fact God said it would rain if God says it's going to happen, believe it.
- b) Quick side note and I'll wrap this up: How do we trust in a 2,000 year old promise that Jesus will return? God works on His timing. One can find over 300 predictions in the bible that tie to Jesus first coming. There are over 600 that tie to His second coming. Like the rain, just because it hasn't happened yet, does not mean it won't happen one day.
27. Verse 45: Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.
- a) In the meantime, the rain came and came hard. There's an old joke in Southern California that it doesn't rain much, but when it does, it pours. That's what I see happening here.
- b) In the final verse we have Elijah traveling to where queen Jezreel was before the king got there. The way I picture this is the servant of Elijah had to go find the king and tell him to go home to his wife. In effect Elijah got a head start. He tucked his robe in his belt so he could run faster and got to the king's home first. What happens next, is in the next lesson.

28. As one can tell, we are not done with Elijah or this story. This saga continues in the next chapter. To give a clue, Jezreel who probably saw Elijah's sacrifice and left after that, didn't convert from her Baal worship to Judaism based on that demonstration. I find when people see things that are contradictory to their faith it usually takes a lot more than that to convert people to other beliefs. In short, God still has to work on the hearts of Ahab, Jezreel and the Israelites living in the North. We won't read of any long-term conversions, but I'll save that issue for next time.
29. The lesson for us is a long-term commitment to serving God is not based on us seeing any great demonstrations of God's power, but a daily trust in His existence. It is about spending daily time in prayer, the bible and regular time with other believers. The way we increase our faith is by the evidence of His existence as found in His word and by watching God work in the lives of others around us. On that positive note, I'll end in prayer.
30. Father, There are times in our lives, where we do need the big miracles of "rain" to come. Help us to remember that You are well aware of current situation and You know our needs in order to be a good witness for You. Help us to trust You so that we can use our lives to make a difference for You in this world. May we continue to trust in the truth of Your word and not the world around us. Help us to make at difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.