

Small Group Guide

28 Days of Prayer - Immanuel Baptist Church

Week 3 - September 1, 2024

Passage: 1 Kings 18:20-40

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Introduction/Background Building:

- Here's the scene. There is a corrupt and godless government. People are scared to talk about the Bible in public. The culture is worshipping pleasure, power, sex, and money. Everyone just does whatever they think is right.
- The scene is not America in 2024; it's Israel in the days of Elijah.
- Elijah was one of the greatest figures in the Bible. He shows up several times throughout the Bible, but 1 and 2 Kings give us the most information about him.
- Elijah lived in a day much like our own: everyone doing whatever they wanted to do, lawlessness, corrupt government, child sacrifice (abortion), persecution of God's people, worship of sex, power, and money.
- Why study Elijah? We study Elijah to learn about:
 - God's faithfulness to His people in a godless society.
 - How we can stay faithful to God in a darkening world.
 - How we can face discouragement, oppression, and depression through faith in God.
- These small group lessons complement other parts of Elijah's story, which we'll study in Sunday morning worship services, Wednesday night prayer services, and our weekly devotionals. You'll have to be a part of each of these incredible times of spiritual growth to get the full picture!
- Key verses for 28 Days of Prayer:
- James 5:16-18 NLT

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a

righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

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.

Small Group Lesson Week 3

Last Week: God tells Elijah to go to King Ahab and that God will send rain. Elijah meets another servant of God, Obadiah. Obadiah risked his life to follow God's plan by bringing Ahab to Elijah. Elijah calls for an epic showdown on Mt. Carmel between the One True God and Ahab's 850 false prophets.

Big Truth #1: God wants us to actively choose to follow Him.

20 So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel.

- The Canaanites believed Mount Carmel was where their gods ruled in power.
- Baal was the highest god in ancient paganism. He was worshipped in an attempt to encourage fertility (animal, agricultural, and human fertility).
- Asherah (or Ashtoreth) was the goddess of pleasure, fertility, and sex. Together, Baal and Asherah were the king and queen demon-gods of the day.

- The One True God commanded that His people worship and serve only Him.
- In defiance to him, God's people had turned to idols and false gods, even sanctioning false prophets to lead them in worship of these worthless idols. They tore down the altars of the One True God and put temples to the false gods in their place.
- Now these same people who had worshipped the idols gathered at Mt. Carmel, a place of worship. Carmel means "fruitful garden" or "fertile field." Mt. Carmel was important to the worship of Baal and was very beautiful and gardenlike.
- Their whole world stopped for this epic showdown of the gods.
- **Discussion Question:** What idols do people commonly worship instead of God today?
- The people gathered for a test to see which god had power. Do you think people stop to think about the capability of their idols/gods today? Do people's idols give ultimate satisfaction or fulfillment in life?

21 Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "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!" But the people were completely silent.

- God and Baal were and are completely opposed. There's no way the people could worship both and be consistent.
- Our culture rejects absolute truth. Instead, people buy into the lie that "truth depends" on the person, circumstance, or emotion being felt at the given time. So, a higher authority that can absolutely say what is right or wrong is totally rejected.

- To the person who says, “There is no absolute truth,” we can ask, “Is that an absolute statement?”
- Just as the sky is blue and $2+2=4$, there *is* absolute truth. There is right and wrong.
- Elijah called the people to choose sides, but they were fence-riders. They were silent, waiting to see how the showdown between God and Baal would turn out.
- God doesn’t want us to waver in our worship of Him. He doesn’t want us to try and mix our worship of Him with idols.
- If I were to give you a glass of 99% water with one drop of rat poison, would you still drink it? In the same way, God wants us to fully, wholeheartedly, and purely worship Him through the power of His Spirit.

22 Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. 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.

- One with God is a majority. Even though Elijah was facing human odds of 450 to 1, God would get the victory.
- The NLT Life Application Study Bible contrasts the true prophets and false prophets like this (p. 736):

False Prophets	True Prophets
Worked for political purposes to benefit themselves	Worked for spiritual purposes to serve God and the people
Held positions of great wealth	Owned little or nothing
Gave false messages	Gave true messages
Spoke only what the people wanted to hear	Spoke only what God told them to say, no matter how unpopular

False prophets point us to lies; true prophets point us to the truth. Israel would now be asked to choose between false prophets and true prophets, false gods, and the One True God.

Big Truth #2: Sincerity doesn't matter when you're worshipping the wrong god.

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, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

The prophets of Baal did everything they could to get their god to act. They danced around and shouted, but nothing happened. All their passion and fervor got them nowhere.

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!”

- Now, Elijah starts trash-talking. What good is their god if he can't set fire to a pile of wood in the middle of a drought? Elijah mocks Baal and his prophets, asking if perhaps he's away on a trip or using the bathroom and can't respond. This mocking only made the prophets do crazier things.

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.

- The worship of these demonic gods led to self-harm. These false prophets thought they could control the supernatural through their shouting, dancing, and mutilation of themselves. For hours and hours, they tried to summon the supernatural.
- People sincerely try to control or access the supernatural today through spells, mediums, psychics, seances, Ouija boards, etc. To do so is to play with fire!
- Also, many people think that the sincerity of their beliefs is enough to make them right with God. “It doesn't really matter what you believe, as long as you sincerely believe it” they say. If you sincerely believe your bank account has a million dollars, does it mean you're a millionaire?

Big Truth #3: Our faith in God should be public.

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.

- Before all the false prophets and all the people of Israel, Elijah restored worship to God and publicly expressed faith in Him by rebuilding the broken altar.

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.

- Blood sacrifices seem a little strange to us, but God's Word is clear that without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sins. Blood represents life. God, the giver of life, requires a blood sacrifice to forgive and atone for sin. The twelve stones on Elijah's altar represented all of Israel, who had sinned and disobeyed God.

Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood."

- The water was possibly salt water that was readily available rather than fresh water that was scarce.

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.

- Elijah wanted it to be impossible for fire to consume the altar, so he had the altar drenched three times. Elijah expressed a public faith in God. There would be no going back. He was out on a limb; unless God showed up, he would be humiliated.
- **Discussion Questions:** Have you ever been in a situation where you were helpless without God?

- Did this situation build your faith in God? If so, how?

Big Truth #4: Prayer is powerful.

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.”

Instead of dancing, shouting, and cutting himself, Elijah simply prayed to God. His prayer was bold and called upon God’s glory and name. Even though the people were fickle and wavering, Elijah prayed that they would know the power of the One True God.

Discussion Questions: Imagine that you were in Elijah’s shoes. What would be going through your mind during this situation?

- James 5:16-18 NLT

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

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!

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Here are a few characteristics of Elijah’s prayer:

- It was humble.

- It asked for God's will.
- It was specific.
- It was earnest and passionate.
- It was full of faith.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Elijah's prayer teach us about our own prayer life?

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!"

God miraculously shows up. A supernatural aerial attack lights the bull, wood, stones, and dust on fire. The people were so in awe, that they fell down in worship.

How does our physical posture of worship portray the condition of our hearts?

40 Then Elijah commanded, "Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one escape!" So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

No longer would demon worship be tolerated. The false prophets had made their choice, hardened their hearts, and had defiantly rejected God. To keep them around would be to invite them to continue to seduce and mislead God's people. So, the people stopped the evil. Evil never stops itself. Edmund Burke once said:

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Discussion Questions:

- What is one thing you learned today that you can put into practice tomorrow?
- Why does God hate false worship?
- What are some characteristics of powerful prayer?