

1 Kings 18:1-24 // Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 May 2026

Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0 : 00] This reading is in 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 1 to 24, which can be found on page 359 of the church Bible.

! That's 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 1 to 24.! 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. So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator.

Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord, 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.

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.

[1 : 07] So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. 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? Yes, he replied. Go tell your master, Elijah is here.

What have I done wrong, asked Obadiah, that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? 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. But now you tell me to go to the master and say, Elijah is here.

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 worshipped the Lord since my youth.

[2 : 09] 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, two caves, fifteen each, and supplied them with food and water.

And now you tell me to go to my master and say, Elijah is here. He will kill me. Elijah said, as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, is that you, you troubler of Israel?

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. 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 to eat at Jezebel's table.

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, How long will you waver between two opinions?

[3 : 22] If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.

Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets 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.

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.

Two altars. Two sacrifices. No fire. The God who answers, he is God.

[10:34] Let's head down now to our commentary team overlooking the altar area. Well, the prophets of Baal are getting underway early here on Mount Carmel.

There are quite a lot of them. Literally hundreds of them. Against one Elijah. On paper, that does seem slightly unfair.

Shouting. Chanting. Some dancing. Interesting movement patterns there from the prophets. And we're still waiting for any response.

No fire. No voice. No answer. Of course, it is relatively early.

And here's an interesting fact for you. King Ahab currently holds the all-time record for doing more evil in the sight of the Lord than any king before him.

[11:41] Okay, the volume is definitely increasing now. More shouting. More dancing. Still no answer. At this stage, you do begin to wonder if shouting louder is actually helping.

But the prophets of Baal remain committed to their strategy. Well, the prophets of Baal have now been calling out for several hours. Still no answer.

No fire. Still no response whatsoever. And Elijah appears to have some thoughts. Come on.

Shout louder. Maybe his hearing aids are flat. Oh, no, no, no. He's definitely a god. But you haven't tried dancing in that bit there yet. That's the problem, I think.

Oh, that smells. Oh, he's on the toilet. He'll be with you shortly. Nice weather.

[13:00] Maybe he's gone down south for a bit. Anything? Try his other number.

Did you book him in advance? Well, they've certainly taken Elijah's advice on board.

The volume has increased significantly. More shouting, more dancing, possibly some light jogging. and still no answer, no voice, no fire, no reply.

It's almost as if Baal isn't real. Well, difficult scenes there, very difficult scenes.

And now it appears the prophets of Baal have exhausted themselves, which, well, from a sporting perspective, it's just not cricket. Looks like they've given up.

[14:18] But as they say, it's a game of two halves, because we're going back ringside to see how Elijah himself gets on. Elijah steps forward. No shouting.

No dancing. No chanting. He quietly rebuilds the altar. Twelve stones, one for each tribe of Israel.

The sacrifice is prepared. Now, this is interesting. Elijah is pouring water over the sacrifice.

Once. Twice. Three times. Everything's soaked. Which, from a fire-starting perspective, is not ideal. And yet Elijah remains remarkably unconcerned. Let's listen in now as Elijah prays. Lord. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

[15:39] Let it be known today that you are God. Answer me, Lord. Show these people who you are, so that they may know you are turning their hearts back to you.

And would you look at that! Fire! Fire from heaven! It's burned the sacrifice.

It's burned the wood, the stones, even the water! Everything is gone, and the people are falling down. Oh, my goodness.

This is crazy. Listen to this. The Lord. He is God. The Lord. He is God. The Lord.

Everyone now. He is God. He is God. After all the shouting, after all the dancing, one simple prayer, and the Lord answers immediately.

[16:43] Extraordinary scenes here on Mount Carmel. And we're hearing reports coming in. Yes. Yes, apparently this broadcast is being interrupted by an amber weather warning.

Well, down in the south, around the Dead Sea, the Jordan Valley, and Jerusalem. Squirtio. Squirtio, squirtio, squirtio. Squirtio.

Squirtio. But now, oh, cumulus nimbus. I'm sorry.

Did you say a cloud? That's correct. A cloud. Cumulus nimbus. Clouds seem to be, appear to be forming around the Mediterranean region.

And it's starting to drizzle. Well, extraordinary developments. We're now receiving reports of moisture.

[17:43] We interrupt this broadcast for a special report. Experts are monitoring the situation closely. Well, that escalated quickly.

A short while ago, no fire. No rain. No answer. But when Elijah prayed, the Lord answered immediately. One God stayed silent.

One God answered. And that leaves us with a question. Who are we listening to? Who are we following? Who are we trusting?

We're going to think about that after the next song. And apparently, it's impossible drizzle. Until then, you stay classy, St Silas. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Would you like to stand again?

[18 : 54] I'm going to sing an appropriate one. I saw the days of Elijah.

I saw the days of Jesus.

I saw the days of Jesus. Still be on a voice in the desert. Crying prepared. The way of the Lord.

We hope he comes. Shining on the clouds. Shining like a song. At the trumpet call.

Lift your voice. Born since a year of Jubilee The mountains lie until salvation falls At least all the days of Ezekiel The dry bones becoming a splash At least all the days of your servant Gave a revival in a temple of grace At least all the days of your harvest The fields always rise in your wealth And we are the laborers In your opinion

[21 : 22] We are the earth in the earth Of the earth The holy comes Riding on the cross Shining like a song At the trumpet call, lift your voice Since the year of Jubilee And Adam's I am still salvation Come to the Holy Ghost Shining on the clouds Shining like the sun At the trumpet call, lift your voice Since the year of Jubilee And Adam's I am still salvation Come to the Holy Ghost And children, you can stay there

Go back if you prefer Well that escalated quickly, didn't it? Fire from heaven, rains returning The weather presenter discovering Clydes for the first time in living memory But underneath all the drama and comedy There's a serious message in 1 Kings 18 That asks us some serious questions So let's bow our heads and pray to God And ask for his help as we think about it a little bit more Heavenly Father, we pray that your spirit would be among us And applying your word to our hearts We pray that you would give us ears to listen And we pray that you would transform us from within As we think about this bit of your word For we ask in Jesus' name, Amen Yeah, so 1 Kings 18 asks some serious questions Questions like Who are we listening to?

Who are we trusting? Who are we following? Now maybe you're sitting there thinking Well this is a great story But it doesn't really apply to me I'm not tempted to worship Baal Never once thought You know what I need in my life?

A small gold statue in my living room And fair enough But let's think a little bit more carefully About what's going on here Because the big competition in this chapter Isn't really about a competition between God and Baal at all After all, Baal isn't a real God He doesn't even exist The real change happens in the people So let's look at the people before the fire falls And Elijah asks them a very simple question A very simple question in verse 21 How long will you waver between two different opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow Him But if Baal is God, follow Him It's not exactly a trick question Come on Israel Who is the Lord?

[24 : 47] Who is God? Is it the Lord? Or is it Baal? Not a trick question And what do the people say? They say nothing Nada They're stumped And they can't answer And in a more literal translation Which we'll have up on the screen Elijah says they are limping Between the two different opinions Limping And that's interesting Because just a few verses later The prophets of Baal are described as limping Around the altar That's a whole lot of limping Now some of you might be thinking Well the summer is in sight And I'm sort of just about limping on towards the end of time Perhaps the teachers especially But verse Let's just think about here They're limping spiritually The whole nation had sort of been stumbling Spiritually unsteady They're confused They're unable to choose

They're trying to follow Two different gods At once And when Elijah asks the people To choose the true God They do not answer Just as a few verses Later on No one answers The false gods But then just look at what happens When Elijah prays In verse 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell And burned up the sacrifice And everything else Besides Suddenly everything changes And suddenly the people are in no doubt at all Who the real God is And when the people saw this They fell down And worshipped The Lord He is God The Lord He is God Now they know Now they answer Now their hearts are turning back To the real God And that helps us To understand something else Why does God wait Until fire From heaven Before he sends the rain

Why doesn't he just send the rain Why bother With the fire Let's think about The shape of the chapter For a second So we've got a kind of Sandwich there Where Elijah meets Ahab At the

beginning And the end of the chapter At the beginning There's no rain Obviously at the end There's rain And in the middle There's this showdown With the fire So the drama with the fire Is sandwiched By the no rain And the rain So why wait for the rain?

I think it's because The deepest problem in Israel Was not the empty skies It was that The people's hearts Were wandering From the Lord The drought was never merely About the weather It was It was more like A wake up call God was not simply Trying to make Israel Thirsty for water God was trying to make His people thirsty For himself again And actually Many years earlier Many years earlier In 1 Kings 8 God had already explained That this is exactly What would happen So listen to these words From Solomon's prayer In 1 Kings chapter 8 Again it'll be up On the screen When the heavens Are shut up And there is no rain Because your people Have sinned against you And when they pray Towards this place And give praise To your name And turn from their sin Because you have Afflicted them Then hear from heaven And forgive their sin

The drought was designed To wake the people up And turn them back To God That's exactly What Elijah prays In chapter 18 Verse 37 Answer me Lord Answer me So these people Will know that you Lord Are God And that you're Turning their hearts Back again Now we might not Worship Baal today But we We still have idols Every culture Has idols And you know You can sometimes Tell what a society Worships By looking at The skyline The towering spires Of the financial district The vast cathedral Shopping mall Of consumerism We still have things That we trust We still have things That we build Our lives around We still have things That we look for For happiness Or identity Security That kind of thing

[29 : 23] So we have things That we look for For approval And very often We limp Between two different Opinions as well Trying to follow Jesus On the one hand While also Functionally looking Elsewhere For affirmation Maybe it's money The promise That if We just Earned that Little bit more We just bought A little bit more Owned a little bit more We'd finally feel secure Or maybe it's Status For you Or success The approval Of other people We want people To think that we matter That we're Successful Or important Or beautiful Or funny Or interesting Or light Maybe it's Relationship We say we follow Jesus But deep down It's The opinion Of another Person That matters Most to us Perhaps a boyfriend Or a girlfriend

Maybe it's Not a romantic Relationship But somebody Else Whose approval We couldn't Imagine living Life without And if we're Not careful We can even Turn Christian leaders Into idols A preacher A missionary A writer Someone who Has Personally Invested in us And helped us Along the way And before long If we're not Careful We can find Ourselves Treating them As though They could Never Fail us But no Christian leader Can carry the Weight of being Treated Like a Saviour Only Jesus Can But here's The thing About false Gods They always Promise More Than they Can give See that In chapter 18 The prophets Of Baal Spend all They shouting Dancing Striving Exhausting Themselves And still

No voice No answer No response At all False gods Still do that Today Money never Finally says Enough Success Never finally Says You matter Human approval Never ultimately Satisfies False gods Ask for Everything And give Nothing Back They cannot Forgive Sin They cannot Give Eternal Life And they Cannot bring Wandering hearts Back to God But on Mount Carmel The Lord Answers Not because Elijah shouted Louder Not because He performed Better Not because Elijah was Impressive Somehow in Himself The Lord Answered Because he Really is God The living God The God Who wants His people To turn Back to Himself That's Exactly Why Jesus Came Not merely To impress People with His miraculous Power But to Turn our Wandering hearts Back to Him To forgive People like Us Who go Limping between One thing And another People who are Prone to Wonder People who are Prone to look Everywhere else For what only Jesus Himself Can give So I think This chapter Is a bit Of a wake Up call We may not Worship Baal But limping Between two Different opinions Is still a very Real danger For us Serving Jesus On a Sunday Serving Money Monday Through Friday Singing About Jesus With our Lips Searching Elsewhere For identity Approval Or security Loving Jesus Loving Our

Non-Christian Girlfriend Or boyfriend I'm thinking That's somehow Not a problem But if you think Of King Solomon He's a case in Point His heart Was pulled Away from Wholehearted Devotion to God By all those Non-Christian Girlfriends I get that Life is Complicated And God Is patient And compassionate And merciful In his Dealings With us But for Some of us Today The most Loving thing That God Could say To you Is exactly What Elijah Said on Mount Carmel How long Will you Go on Limping Between Two Different Opinions Because Elijah's Challenge Still Stands Today If

The Lord Is God Follow Him If The Lord Is God Follow Him

[34 : 25] So who Are we Trusting Who Are we Listening To Who Are we Following Because There is Only One God Who Answers There is Only One God Who Saves The Lord He Is God The Lord He Is God Let's Pray Living God You Alone Are God And So As As we Pause For a Moment Now We Ask That By Your Holy Spirit You Would Search Our Hearts Show Us Where We Are Looking For Security Identity Approval Or Happiness Apart From You Show Us Where We Are Limping Between Two Opinions Father

Thank you That you Are The God Who Answered Elijah On Mount Carmel Thank you That you Are The God Who Delights To Turn Wandering Hearts Back To Yourself And Thank you Most Of All For The Lord Jesus Christ Who Came To Seek And Save Those Who Had Wandered Far From You Please Forgive Us For The Ways That We Trust Other Things More Than We Trust You Forgive Us For Our Divided Hearts And By By Your Spirit Would You Turn Our Hearts Back To You Again Back To Wholehearted Devotion To The Lord Jesus Help Us To Lay Aside Worthless Idols Help Us To to reorder our loves and priorities.

Help us not to go on limping between the two opinions, but to follow you wholeheartedly. For there is only one God who answers, only one God who saves, and only one God worth following. In Jesus' name, amen.