



Elijah & The Great Contest

February 26, 2023

James 5:16b-18 NET — “The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months! Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest.”

Who was Elijah and how is he an example for all of us on the power of prayer?

Today we turn to the northern kingdom where it is one bad king after another. Now, King Ahab is on the throne. And he was a special kind of awful.

1 Kings 16:31 NASB — “And as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him.”

Ahab not only worshiped Baal, but he married the daughter who may have served in the role of high priestess of the worship of Baal.

1 Kings 16:33 NASB — “Ahab also made the Asherah. So Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”

In Matthew 12:26-27 Jesus says Baal (or Baalzebub) and Satan are interchangeable terms. So the King of God's chosen people worshipping Satan and marrying the high priestess of the local Satanic worship center.

They were not to look to any other gods for anything. If they did rebel against God, He promised to do something:

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 (NET) — “I will raise up a prophet like you for them from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak to them whatever I command. I will personally hold responsible anyone who then pays no attention to the words that prophet speaks in my name.”

During the time of King Ahab God keeps His word and raises up a prophet, and we meet him in 1 Kings 17:1.

1 Kings 17:1 — “Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.””

Thus, the Great Contest begins: God vs. Baal

Now, how did Elijah know what to pray?

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 — “Beware that your hearts are not easily deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods, and worship them. Otherwise, the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the sky so that there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce; then you will quickly perish from the good land which the Lord is giving you.”

Elijah knew what to pray because God brought to His mind Scripture that he had read previously and he prayed it with faith.

Initially, Elijah goes to a nearby stream and has water and God directs birds to bring him food. And then the stream dries up and God tells Elijah to go to Baal country in nearby Sidon to a small town called Zerephath where a widow lives, a non-jew.

1 Kings 17:10-12 — “So he arose and went to Zerephath, and when he came to the entrance of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, “Please get me a little water in a cup, so that I may drink.” As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand.” But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have no food, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks so that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son, so that we may eat it and die.””

This widow has been uncared for by her Canaanite king, and God wants to show her that His kingship is superior to what she has experienced. Because the widow is willing to trust Yahweh, God performs a daily miracle in her home as her oil and flour never run out.

Ending the Contest — God sends Elijah to meet with Ahab

1 Kings 18:17 — “When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?””

1 Kings 18:18 — “He said, “I have not brought disaster to Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals.””

1 Kings 18:19 — “Now then, send orders and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.””

1 Kings 18:20–22 — “So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.””

When Elijah takes his stand in this contest he seems to stand alone. The odds were 850 to 1. But if you go all in Yahweh, and your identity is Yahweh is your God, He promises to never leave you and you will never truly be alone.

1 Kings 18:23–24 — “Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.””

Elijah gives Team Baal every advantage in this contest.

First, he picks fire as the goal. Secondly, he lets Team Baal go first. Team Baal was ultimately unsuccessful.

1 Kings 18:30–31 — “Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name.””

1 Kings 18:36–38 — “At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”

The Great Contest wasn’t such a great contest after all, because God always wins. The question is, whose side are we on?

We all have an idol or two in our lives that we may not view as an idol. Israel got confused when Elijah asked the question, “who will you serve?” Israel didn’t know how to answer, so they were silent.

Ephesians 5:5 — “For this you know with certainty, that no sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, which amounts to an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

What does it look like to worship the idol of sexual immorality? When we look for sexual gratification from anything outside of a marriage between one man and one woman — that is sin and idolatry.

If you are single today, hear this encouragement. God offers a full and abundant life as a single person. Jesus lived His whole life in abundance, with close friendships, doing the will of the Father, yet He never married, and died a virgin. The Apostle Paul did all of His ministry single and lived an abundant and effective life, and kept the faith until the end. It may be your season of being single is a short one or it may be a long one but don’t buy into the lie that singleness means a less abundant life.

Materialism was also an idol for the church in Ephesus. God created so many things for our enjoyment. But we need to enjoy them by acknowledging Him first as the giver of all those things and by being open-handed with the things he has given us.

Deuteronomy 8:18 NASB — “But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

When we look at money or things to make us happy beyond what we can afford we are worshiping at the altar of materialism.

Are you feeling spiritually dry? I wonder if there are idols in your life that need to be tossed out. I wonder if some of us have bought the line that God is holding back from you and if you try another god for a while it will turn out better.

My prayer for you today is that you see God for all He truly is, worthy of your worship, your allegiance, and your life. It begins by agreeing with God about the sin, confessing it to Him, and receiving His forgiveness. Repentance also includes the concept of turning away from sin and turning to God.

Matthew 6:33 — “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.”

I know from that promise if I keep following Jesus and pursuing Him, I’ll have everything I need.