Leader guide

In this lesson:

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18

CORE BELIEF: GOD THE FATHER

God the Father (Psalm 121:1–2): We believe God is personally involved in and cares about the daily lives of His children.

TAKE HOME TRUTH

God will go to sacrificial lengths for his remnant people, propelling them to worship and protecting them from the enemy.

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Our Jealous King

OVERVIEW

In January 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first U.S. president to travel to a hostile, combat environment during wartime. His destination was Casablanca, Morocco. The Allied forces had just landed in North Africa two months earlier and gained their first victory of the war against the German Afrika Corp under the command of Gen. Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox. Up to this point, the Allies had suffered defeat after defeat to the Germans.

At Casablanca, President Roosevelt and British Prime Ministry Winston Churchill met to make strategic plans for the war against Germany. (Soviet Premier Josef Stalin could not attend because the Red Army was engaged in a life-or-death battle with the German 6th Army at Stalingrad, a battle that would leave almost 2 million men dead, wounded, or captured before victory was declared by the Red Army.)

From this conference would emerge two words that would shape the rest of the war and, in many cases, the rest of the 20th Century—"Unconditional Surrender." These two words became the guiding doctrine that would set as the goal for Allied forces in Europe not just the defeat of the Axis powers, but their complete destruction.

We see a similar parallel this week in 1 Kings 18. For more than three years Israel has suffered under an intense drought. The resulting famine led to widespread death. Still, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel cling to their false god, Baal.

During the drought, Elijah the Tishbite has been in hiding. Now, God tells Elijah to go and show himself to Ahab (18:1). God is ready to end the drought and bring rain, but before He sends the rain, He wants Elijah to destroy the prophets of Baal. Not just run them out of town, but completely destroy them. Unconditional Surrender.

This will happen in a demonstration of God's mighty power that will literally rain fire from heaven. This chapter, 1 Kings 18, is one of the Mountain Peaks of Scripture in all the Bible.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

1 Kings 18:36-37 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that 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 hearts back."

INTRODUCTION

To date, what do you consider to be one of your great accomplishments in your life, a highlight that still rings loudly in your memory?

Looking back at your notes from this week's sermon, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

Make sure you ask this question this week. It gives people the opportunity to discuss questions or issues that come up beyond the written questions. People's responses can often lead into one of the questions in the "Digging Deeper" section. Also, some weeks this question will result in a lot of discussion, other weeks, not so much.

READ THE TEXT

In 1 Kings 17, we read that after Elijah announced to wicked King Ahab that God would cause a great drought on the land, the prophet departed from Israel for a period of three years. God provided for Elijah in miraculous ways. At the end of three years, the word of the Lord came to Elijah that he would send rain to the land and that he was to go and show himself to King Ahab. What follows is one of the great demonstrations of God's power in recorded history. Read 1 Kings 18.

NOTES

NOTES

DIGGING DEEPER

In this section, feel free to develop your own questions to help guide your group's discussion. Below are some suggestions. Remember, if you are hearing from everyone in your group, chances are you won't have to time to discuss every question. You may start with one that catches your attention so you don't run out of time. For example, it's not odd to start with Question #6, then go to Question #5 and if you have time come back to Question #4.

Why would Elijah have concern for his life by showing himself to Ahab?

As we can tell from the context of this week's text, Elijah was a hunted man. In fact, he may have been at the top of Israel's Most Wanted list in the 700s BC. Elijah had been in hiding for three years at the point 1 Kings 18 picks up the story, and during this time Israel has suffered greatly from a drought and famine that no doubt left many dead.

You can tell from the conversation between Elijah and the government official, Obadiah, that King Ahab wants Elijah dead. (NOTE: This is not the Prophet Obadiah for whom a book of the Bible is named.)

You can tell when Elijah and Ahab finally meet and Ahab greats him as "Israel's Troubler" (v. 17). To understand the context of this description, consider that the same word is used describe Achan in the book of Joshua (Joshua 7:25). Achan illegally kept some of the plunder from the defeated city of Jericho, and this sin caused Israel to suffer its first military defeat in the Battle of Ai (see Joshua 7). Calling Elijah the Troubler of Israel not only placed the blame directly on Elijah for the terrible drought and famine, but connected him with shame and blame of Achan. This would be similar to calling someone a "Benedict Arnold" today. We all understand that a "Benedict Arnold" is another word for traitor.

Still, Elijah is not intimidated in the least. He correctly reminds Ahab that it is indeed the king who is the Troubler of Israel because of the sins he has committed and his family has committed.

What can we learn about the man named Obadiah from vs. 3-16?

There are mixed feelings about the official in Ahab's government identified as Obadiah. On the one hand, several commentators see him as an example of a man of God who has compromised himself in order to advance his career.

Adrian Rogers, a preacher I greatly admire, explains why he sees Obadiah as a compromiser:

> *Why do I think he was a compromiser? He was looking for grass when he should have been praying for rain. What do I mean? Well, he was trying to prop things up. He was trying to get by without repentance and without repentance on the part of God's people. The judgment that we have, friend, is never going to be taken out, the judgment that is upon us, until the rain comes from God. And the rain in this passage is a symbol of revival. We think with church pageants, personality, and programs we can bring revival. But you can't bring revival by the works of the flesh. You can search for all of the grass that you want.*

Dale Ralph Davis, however, takes an alternative view in summing up Obadiah:

> *Obadiah stands in contrast not only to Ahab but also to Elijah, for verses 7-15 suggest a clear distinction between the civil servant and the prophet. Elijah seems bold, confrontational, intrusive, while Obadiah appears hesitant, cautious, and fearful. Because of this, some interpreters in my opinion misjudge Obadiah. Some see Obadiah as essentially a compromiser (like Israel in v. 21), a boss-serving, career-protecting, life-preserving fence straddler. Now, clearly, Obadiah is afraid Ahab will execute him should he herald Elijah's return; he alludes to such a fate three times (vv. 9, 12, 14). Imagine that: a servant of the Lord who prefers not to die. Is that so strange? Yet Obadiah's fear does not arise from a reluctance to say (literally), 'Behold, Elijah!' (vv. 8, 11, 14) to Ahab but from his supposition about what will happen after he announces Elijah's return. He spells this out in verses 11-12: Obadiah will announce Elijah, Ahab will go to meet him, but the Spirit of Yahweh will 'spirit' Elijah away (as a protective measure against Ahab's designs?), and so Obadiah will be executed for the prophetic no-show (cf. 2 Kings 2:16). That was Obadiah's suspicion, whether justified or not.*
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> *When all is said, it seems to me that the text views Obadiah positively. To be sure, Obadiah cites his life-long commitment to Yahweh (v. 12b) and his secret rescue of Yahweh's prophets (v. 13) as arguments against his death-inviting mission to Ahab. (Elijah might place an enemy under such a threat, but surely not a compatriot!) These items from Obadiah's resume, however, do not represent his own inflated view of himself. The narrator himself has already informed us of these very facts in his 'parenthesis' (vv. 3b-4). That is the writer's view of Obadiah and we should stick with it. It took guts to do what Obadiah did (vv. 4, 13). He didn't have to be told what would happen to him if his prophet preservation program was uncovered. Yet just because he had guts did not mean he was fearless (vv. 9ff.). We shouldn't sit in our comfortable study chairs and berate Obadiah because he is not Elijah, Jr.*

What do you think? Was Obadiah a compromiser or was he a silent servant of the Lord worthy of our honor?

What do we learn about living in difficult times from v. 5?

Verse 5 tells us a lot about how people respond during times of prolonged struggle. It states, "And Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive so that we will not have to kill any livestock."

As Davis notes, this kind of attitude is typical of kings and governments in general. Ahab is more concerned about the horses and mules than he is in the lives of his people.

Before you judge Ahab too quickly in this matter, however, recognize the political, economic, and military pressures Ahab must consider. As we noted last week, the drought and famine have weakened Israel considerably. Meanwhile, the neighboring Syrians are growing stronger and more menacing. Horses and mules were essential to Israel's military defense. According to the recovered ancient records of Shalmaneser III of Assyria, Ahab possessed a force of at least 2,000 chariots. This would have required a lot of horses and mules to power these chariots, and horses and mules run on food and water.

NOTES

NOTES

There is an important principle here when it comes to survival in difficult times: a shortage of food and water brings out the worst in people. Even the best of people (and Ahab is far from a neighborhood good guy) will begin to act unlawfully and unethically when survival is at hand.

This has always been a thought that has crossed my mind when I hear of modern-day preppers. For reasons I find difficult to understand, many Christian ministries are big on selling food survival kits and gold. Here's the difficulty: if we ever enter a time of prolonged chaos that leads to shortages of food and water, to what lengths will folks go to protect their supplies? Unless you are ready to defend your supplies using lethal actions, you will probably find yourself a victim of looters and thieves.

Question: How should Christians prepare for and respond in times of a prolonged government and society collapse?

Side Note: for an interesting look a how quickly and rapidly law and order can collapse following a catastrophic event, I recommend the book CyberStorm by Matthew Maher. This book shows, first hand, what a major cyber/terror attack might look like from the perspective of one family trying to survive it. This isn't zombies, but a believable, realistic scenario of what would happen to a major city if a string of not-that-unlikely events were to pile up one after the other.

What is the significance of choosing Mt. Carmel as the site of the showdown?

Elijah may have specified Mt. Carmel for a reason. Carmel juts out into the Mediterranean near modern Haifa and, as a range of limestone hills extends southeast for some eleven miles.

In Egyptian records from the second-millennium bc. Mt. Carmel is called 'Holy Head,' suggesting it was a sanctuary. In the annals of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (841 bc) Mount Carmel appears as 'the mountain of Baal of the promontory.' One might simply say, 'Baal's Bluff.' Carmel may well have been ground sacred to Baal, and Elijah may have chosen it for that very reason.

If Carmel was Baal's turf (note that Yahweh's altar there had been pulled down, 18:30), then he had what in contemporary athletics we call "home court advantage'. Teams playing at 'home' enjoy thorough familiarity with the court or field and can count on the psychological boost of their parti-

Statue of Elijah at Mount Carmel in Israel.

san fans. If Yahweh whips Baal on the latter's own turf, it will only highlight the supremacy of Yahweh and magnify the impotence of Baal.

In view of Elijah's directive that Ahab summon the people from all over Israel, it is likely that hundreds, if not thousands, congregated on Mount Carmel.

Side Note: If you visit Mount Carmel today in Israel, you will find a statue erected to the Prophet Elijah on the site where the Showdown of the Gods took place.

What did Elijah ultimately hope to accomplish in this contest with the Prophets of Baal? Was he successful?

Very dramatically, Elijah rebuilt the altar, now damaged by the frantic Baal worship. He then soaked it with water to remove any doubt about the miracle that would soon occur. When Elijah prayed for the fire to fall, he asked the Lord to remind the people that the God to whom He was praying is the covenant God of Israel. Without Yahweh, there would be no Israel. Elijah also prayed that he would be vindicated as the prophet of the covenant God. Finally, Elijah asked that the people know Yahweh is God, and that they have the opportunity to repent at once. This prayer incorporated concern, then, for God's reputation, the validity of the prophet's work, and for the people's wellbeing. God answered his prayer, and the people fell in the worship of God.

What did the provision of rain after the contest with the prophets of Baal ultimately show about God?

With his enemies dispatched, Elijah demonstrated one last time that Yahweh is Lord. It was time for rain. He counseled Ahab to hurry home so he would not be caught in the rain. When the rains came, the Lord's victory was completed. God sustained and protected his prophets, while Baal let his die. Yahweh fed the orphans and widows and raised the dead, while Baal let the needy suffer and required Anat to raise him from the dead. Yahweh sent fire and rain from heaven, but Baal could not respond to his most valiant worshipers. A god like Baal is no God at all. A God like Yahweh must be God of all. The rain that fell was not just rain; rather, it was evidence of the Lord's absolute sovereignty over nature and human affairs.

What lessons can we learn from Elijah's Showdown on Mt. Carmel?

1. ***Leaders often have their motives questioned.*** *As we see in the example of Obadiah in our text this week, standing in the gap like he did can lead to others questioning your motives. One sees his actions as that of a compromiser and another sees his actions as valiant and brave. One thing I've learned after close to 30 years in the ministry is that leaders must accept that their motives will be questioned. This shouldn't prohibit us from doing what we believe is right, we just must accept that even in the best of circumstances, others will question and accuse us of wrongdoing.*

2. ***Difficult times test our values and ethics.*** *One of the fallacies of history is judging others for actions they take in extremely difficult circumstances. In this week's text, it's quick to conclude that Ahab cares more about horses than he does people. The reality of the situation is much different. The same is true today. When we are faced with life and death choices, and there is no "good" option, we are often left with a decision between several "bad" options. This can often lead us into a moral or*

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ethical conflict. One helpful piece of advice is to make sure your life is built upon a strong moral and ethical foundation based on the Word of God before you find yourself facing an impossible situation.

3. ***Living on the fence is not an option for a devoted follower of God.*** *As we see in this week's text, Elijah demanded a choice when he asked the people, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (v. 21). If we are honest with ourselves, we need to answer the same question. Too often we find ourselves trying to divide our allegiance between following the Lord and maintaining our place in the world. Here at First Family, our mission is simple: to develop devoted followers of Jesus Christ who celebrate, grow, and serve. "Devoted followers" is not compatible with fence sitters. Choose this day whom you will follow: if the Lord is God, follow Him; but if you want to be part of the world, follow the world.*

4. ***Prayer is our most effective strategy when confronting problems.*** *If there is one powerful lesson from this week's text, it is this: prayer matters. We stand in amazement at the power of this seen, but realize that at the very core of this Mt. Carmel experience was one simple man's prayer and the glory of God. Let me ask you a simple question: when trials happen, is your first response, "let's pray," or is it "let's look for a solution." Prayer matters. A lot of folks shy away when asked to pray in public, and that is understandable. Still, that is no excuse for not praying. Do you personally pray? When a difficult situation confronts you, do you rely on prayer? If not, let this be an encouragement to adopt this as a standard response in your life. Remember the words of James when he taught on dealing with trials in life:*

> *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. James 5:13-18*

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER

> *"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." – Isaiah 56:7.*

Prayer Focus for the Week of April 15

Ask that God will grant you wisdom and strength to trust Him against overwhelming odds. Pray that your prayers would be ones of true and bold faith.

NEXT STEPS

Questions to consider as you continue to reflect on what you learned this week:

- **Take Action:** Is there an area in your life where you need help? Have you brought the matter to the Lord in prayer? Take time this week to specifically pray for God's work in this area of life. Remember, cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you! (1 Peter 5:7)
- **Take Courage:** Take some time and reflect on this week's take home truth: God will go to sacrificial lengths for his remnant people, propelling them to worship and protecting them from the enemy. What does this mean to you personally?

Work to memorize this week's memory verse: 1 Kings 18:36-37 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that 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 hearts back."

This week's Core Belief is God the Father (Psalm 121:1–2): We believe God is personally involved in and cares about the daily lives of His children.

Remember to use the Daily Bible Reading plan as part of your walk with Christ, taking the time to reflect on each passage and what it means for your lives.

STUDY NOTES

1 Kings 18

18:1 In the third and last year of the famine God directed Elijah to present himself to King Ahab. Elijah had God's word that He would soon end the drought.

18:2 The famine in the land was particularly severe in the capital, Samaria. God was directing this calamity especially at the guilty parties, Ahab and Jezebel.

18:3 Obadiah had great responsibility in Ahab's court (in charge of Ahab's palace). Obadiah was also a devout believer in the LORD (but not the writer of the Bible book of that name).

18:6 This situation prompted Ahab and his trusted servant, Obadiah, to go in different directions, looking for some grass in the valleys or near the springs where the most necessary animals (horses and mules) might graze.

18:7 Obadiah recognized Elijah when they met somewhere outside Samaria; Elijah was a "wanted" man in Israel. Out of respect for the prophet, Obadiah bowed down to the ground. He could hardly believe he had found Elijah.

18:10 Obadiah explained to the prophet how Ahab had searched for him at home and abroad (v. 10) to no avail. Obadiah affirmed that fact by the familiar words, As surely as the LORD your God lives (cf. 17:1, 12).

18:12 If he reported to his king that Elijah had been found, and then could not produce him, Ahab would regard Obadiah's words as a mocking trick and would probably execute him. (His fears were not altogether ground-

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less, as may be learned from 2 Kings 2, where we read that Elijah was carried into the other world in a fiery chariot!)

18:15 Elijah assured Obadiah that he would not disappear but would indeed stand before Ahab that same day. Elijah's description of God as the LORD Almighty who lives and whom Elijah served (cf. 17:1; 18:36) indicates that he was confident in God's ability to handle the physical and spiritual situation in Israel, an assurance that had grown as a result of his experiences at Cherith and Zarephath.

18:17 We are living at a time when people who believe the Word of God and stand for the Lord are called the troublemakers in this country. In reality, the real troublemakers come from the godless culture in which we live.

18:19 In view of Elijah's directive that Ahab summon the people from all over Israel, it is likely that hundreds, if not thousands, congregated on Mount Carmel.

18:20 Mount Carmel was agreed on by Ahab. It would be a fitting site since it lay between Israel and Phoenicia, the lands of the deities in question. Also Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. No doubt Ahab was highly pleased with this suggested site for the contest because it would have given the Baal prophets a definite advantage; but this did not worry Elijah.

18:21 When all the people had assembled Elijah stood before them and challenged them to end their doublemindedness, wavering between two opinions.

18:27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them, mocking their ineffectiveness. With amusing and bold sarcasm, he suggested that perhaps Baal was thinking about other things, or "pursuing" (lit., relieving himself!), away on a trip (the Phoenician sailors believed Baal traveled with them on the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere), or even sleeping!

18:28 Characteristically Baal's prophets responded by increasing the fervor of their appeals, working themselves into a frenzy. To propitiate their god they mutilated their own bodies as the custom of pagan worshipers has been for centuries.

18:29 no…no…no. This 3-fold declaration emphasized the complete lack of response on the part of Baal. The fact that there was no response indicated Baal's impotence and non-existence (Jer. 10:5).

18:31 An altar to the LORD had been built on the site long before but it was in disrepair. Elijah selected 12 stones, one for each of the tribes. Though the tribes had been divided into two nations they were still one people in God's purposes—with a single Lord, a single covenant, and a single destiny.

18:35 The purpose of this soaking, of course, was to show everyone present that the burning of the sacrifice that was to take place was not a natural phenomenon or a trick but was a miracle. Also the time involved in securing the water would have added to the tension of the hour.

18:36 This sacrifice was offered around 3:00 p.m. (Ex. 29:38–41; Num. 28:3–8).

18:37 Elijah simply asked God to show the people that He is the true God and to turn the hearts of the people back to Himself.

18:39 Spontaneously the crowd cried out in amazement. Since the LORD (Yahweh) had answered by fire (cf. v. 24); they acknowledged that He is the true God.

18:42 Ahab rode off down the mountain to celebrate the end of the drought by eating and drinking, but Elijah walked back up the mountain to pray for rain. His posture as he prayed reflected the earnestness of his petition, again for the glory of the Lord.

18:43 Rains normally came from the west off the Mediterranean Sea, so Elijah instructed his servant to look in that direction.

18:45 At first the rain cloud was small (like a man's hand), but soon the whole sky grew black and heavy rain descended. The torrent evidently overtook Ahab as he rode in his chariot to Jezreel, his winter capital about midway between Mount Carmel and Samaria.

18:46 Jezreel was located between Megiddo and Beth-shan about 17 miles from Mount Carmel. Elijah probably served as an outrunner for the king, a privileged position in the ancient Near East. Despite his frequent condemnation of Ahab, Elijah had a genuine concern both for God's testimony and the soul of the king. The girding up of his loins carries with it the ideas of energetic action and obedience (cf. 2 Kin. 4:29; Prov. 31:17; 1 Pet. 1:3)

COMING DATES THIS SPRING

05/13/2018 – Mother's Day

05/25/2018 – Lighthouse Semester Ends

05/27/2018 – Summer Break Begins

09/09/2018 – Lighthouse Fall Semester Begins

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