

Elijah and the Contest at Mt. Carmel



Scripture Reference: [1 Kings 18](#)

Suggested Emphasis: God is real and not just something people have made up.

Memory Verse: Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who truly want to find him. [Hebrews 11:6, ICB](#)



Story Overview:

Elijah had been in hiding for the 3 ½ years of the drought. The Lord now told him to reveal himself to King Ahab. Elijah bravely asked the king to gather all of the people together at Mount Carmel for a contest to see whose god was real. 850 priests of the false gods, Baal and Asherah, also attended. Elijah asked the prophets of Baal to build altars to their “god”. The “god” that made fire appear would be the real and powerful god. The prophets prayed and chanted all day but they could not get their “god” to send fire down to burn the sacrifices on their altars. Finally, Elijah had his altar doused in water and then prayed to the Lord to send fire. Fire immediately consumed the sacrifice, the wood, stones, soil and even the water that had overflowed into the trenches around the altar. After this miracle rain also came to end the drought.

Background Study:

The actual contest between Elijah and the false prophets takes place in the middle of 1 Kings 18, but the verses before and after help set the story up and give context. It could be broken up as follows:

1. (verses 1-15) This gives the context of this being the third year with no rain. Earlier, Elijah had prophesied to King Ahab that there would be no rain until he (Elijah) asked God to bring it again. The meeting between Elijah and Obadiah in these verses reveals the reign of terror God's people were living under. Ahab and Jezebel had led the people away from God and were destroying the prophets of God. You will want to be able to give a brief overview of this before you tell the story of the contest.
2. (verses 16-18) Elijah visits Ahab and lays down the challenge
3. (verses 19-40) The contest
4. (verses 41-46) God answers Elijah's prayer for rain

Ahab was becoming desperate. He had sent people everywhere to find Elijah because he blamed Elijah for Israel's troubles ([1 Kings 18:17](#)). Ahab made neighbouring nations swear an oath that they did not know where Elijah was.

Then God sent Elijah back to Ahab. Elijah told Ahab that it was Ahab who was to be blamed for the drought. As king of Israel, one of his responsibilities was to be an example to his people in the worship of God. Instead, Ahab had allowed his pagan wife to institute the worship of her false gods. Jezebel was an evil woman. She had even ordered the priests of the true God to be hunted down and killed.

Elijah offered Ahab a challenge - gather the Israelites to Mount Carmel. The Carmel mountain range runs from the Mediterranean coast inland for about thirteen miles. It divides the northern part of Israel. Exactly which mountain Elijah was referring to is unknown.

Elijah wanted the people to see this challenge. Having an evil king meant that there was less chance that the people would worship God. He wanted all of them to see how mighty the Lord was. He wanted to make sure that they did not want to follow the false gods of Jezebel.

Along with the people, Elijah wanted the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah brought to Mount Carmel. Baal was the chief male deity, and Asherah was his wife in this pantheon of gods and goddesses that Jezebel had popularised within the nation of Israel.

After Jezebel's blood-filled extermination of the prophets and priests of the Lord, Elijah was the only prophet left who would stand before all of these pagan priests. He challenged the prophets of Baal to prove that Baal was a god in front of the Israelite people.

For three hours, in the heat of the day, Baal's prophets cried, prayed, and carried on, but their god never answered. Then it was Elijah's turn. He first repaired the Lord's altar that had been neglected, dug a trench around it, prepared for the sacrifice, and then ordered that four large jars of water be poured over it. This must have seemed crazy to those who were watching. Baal and Asherah could not even light a spark yet Elijah was challenging the Lord to set fire to an altar that was soaked in water! Elijah's prayer in [1 Kings 18:36-37](#) was only thirty-two words in Hebrew, but the power of these words showed as God's fire consumed the altar. The spectators must have been amazed as the fire consumed the sacrifice, the altar and the stones!

When the people saw this, they fell down and proclaimed, "The Lord - he is God!" ([1 Kings 18:39](#)). There is no record of protest, except from Queen Jezebel, when Elijah put the false prophets to death. As harsh as it might seem, Elijah was obeying what God had commanded hundreds of years earlier ([Deuteronomy 13:1-5](#)).

The powerful God that sent fire to Elijah's water-soaked altar is the same God we serve today. He is the one to follow and obey.

[Additional background information on the Divided Kingdom.](#)



Way to Introduce the Story:

Light a candle and let it burn while you are talking. Talk about fire. What things burn? What should you do if you smell smoke or see a fire? What do firemen do to fires? When you are finished, pour water on the candle and douse the flame. In today's story, we are going to learn about a fire.

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The Story:

Elijah was a prophet. A prophet is someone who gives special messages. Elijah was a prophet of God. He gave special messages from God to all of the people.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel did not like the messages that Elijah gave them. He told them they were bad and wrong to worship other gods besides the Lord. He told them that God would take away the rain so that they would learn that he was God. Ahab and Jezebel were so angry that they tried to kill Elijah and all of the other prophets.

The Lord hid Elijah and kept him safe... After three years of no rain, the Lord decided it was time for Elijah to talk to the King again. He told Elijah to find King Ahab and give him a message. Even though he was warned that the King would try to kill him, Elijah knew that he must obey the Lord. God had taken care of him before. God would take care of him now!

Elijah met Ahab. Ahab was very angry with Elijah, "You are a trouble-maker Elijah. You caused the rain to go away. It is your fault that we have had a drought."

"No, King Ahab," said Elijah. "You caused the drought. It was because you stopped worshipping the Lord. The Lord knows that you and your wife, Jezebel, worship false gods. You make idols and bow down before them. You think that there are other gods named Baal and Asherah. You even believe the men who say they are false gods' prophets. But you are wrong!"

There is only one God. He is the Lord God! He is the only real God. All of the others are just made up. Gather all of the people and all of the prophets of Baal and Asherah together at Mount Carmel. We will have a contest to see whose god is real!"

King Ahab did as Elijah said. People from all over Israel came to watch the contest. It didn't really seem like a fair contest. Elijah was the only prophet of God there. There were 450 prophets of the false god, Baal, and also 400 prophets of the false god, Asherah.

Elijah spoke to all of the people, "Everyone needs to make a decision today. If Baal is real, then you need to worship him. If the Lord God is real, then you need to worship Him!"

Elijah suggested that they should have a contest to prove who the real God was. The prophets of Baal could build an altar, and Elijah could build an altar. Each could place an animal sacrifice on their altar and then pray to their God to light a fire for the sacrifice. The God who could send fire for the sacrifice was the true God.

The prophets of Baal agreed to the contest. They made their altar, prayed, and cried out to Baal. But nothing happened to the sacrifice on the altar. They cried even louder and harder. But still, there was no answer.

The prophets of Baal tried everything. They even cut themselves and acted wild, but Baal still had no answer.

"Maybe Baal is asleep or maybe he is busy," said Elijah. Elijah knew that Baal would never cause fire to come down because Baal was not real. Baal was just a god that someone made up.

Next, it was Elijah's turn. He built an altar to God. He used twelve stones to make it and then he placed the sacrifice on the altar. Then, Elijah did something very unusual! He dug a ditch around the altar he made. He asked for four large jars of water and had them poured over the altar. Then he did it again. And then again. There was so much water that it soaked the sacrifice and all of the wood on the altar. It even ran into the ditch around the altar. How would something soaked in water ever burn? This seemed impossible!

Then Elijah prayed to God. "I pray to you, Lord, because you are the only God. Please show all of these people here today that you are real. Please send down fire and burn this sacrifice."

Then an amazing thing happened. Fire came down out of the sky and burned the sacrifice. But the amazing things did not stop there. The fire was so powerful that it burned the wood on the altar, the stones, the dirt, and even dried up all of the water in the ditch around the altar. There was nothing left.

Now everyone knew that the Lord was the only God. They bowed down and kept saying, "The Lord - he is God! The Lord - he is God!"

The prophets of Baal tried to run away but they were caught and killed.

Remember that there had been a drought for three years? Elijah prayed again. He knew that the Lord would end the drought and that the rain would come. His servant saw a cloud in the sky. The cloud was the size of a man's hand. Then it got bigger and bigger and the sky became black.

Elijah told Ahab that the rain was coming. King Ahab rode his chariot and Elijah ran to beat the storm. The drought was over.

After the fire and the storm, do you think King Ahab learned a lesson? No, he still did not obey the real God. He would rather worship made-up gods. When King Ahab told Queen Jezebel about that she was very angry. The King and Queen hated Elijah and the prophets of God. As long as she lived Queen Jezebel kept sending soldiers to try to kill Elijah.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review Questions:

1. The contest on Mount Carmel was between whom? God and Baal (or Elijah and the prophets of Baal)
2. What happened when the prophets of Baal prayed to Baal to send down fire? Nothing
3. What did Elijah do to the altar of God before he prayed? Had water poured all over it to soak it
4. What happened when Elijah prayed to God? Fire burned the sacrifice, altar, stones, dirt, and water surrounding it.

Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- [He's Got the Whole World in His Hands Song](#)
- [Rejoice in the Lord Always Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- If you are in a suitable location, go outside and douse wood with water and try to light it. Talk about how amazing this miracle was. (Also mention fire safety while you are at it!)
- Older students might create the front page of the "Mt. Carmel Times" newspaper for that day.
- Discuss what how you would feel if there was a crowd of hundreds of people who hated God and you stood up, like Elijah, and said that you believed in God.
- Play a simple word game. [Bible Wordz Game](#) is an adaptable game, children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.

Crafts:

- Make a [shoebox diorama](#). If you are teaching over a number of weeks then you could make a diorama each week to form a collection that reviews the stories. You can have one box for each character and let the class work together or you could even have each child work on his or her own box(s).
- Make a thaumatrope on a stick with an altar on one side and fire on the other. Children can decorate the fire with markers of orange, yellow and red paper, glitter or shiny sequins. [Simple instructions for a thaumatrope here.](#)

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Elijah and the Contest at Mt. Carmel" printables to print on A4 size paper](#)
[Click here for "Elijah and the Contest at Mt. Carmel" printables \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Cute stand-up puppets and figures made from cardboard tubes and craft sticks. The blog post is in Spanish but you can use an online translator to read it. Even if you can't read it the photos are so good that you will be able to easily copy the idea. \(EBD Criariva\)](#)
- [Craft: Toilet paper Elijah with accessories \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Craft: Doorknob hanger \(Sunday school crafts\)](#)
- [Various Elijah and Elisha worksheets. When you arrive at the page scroll down to "Samuel / Kings / Chronicles Sunday School Worksheets". \(Hub pages\)](#)

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