

## 1 Kings 18.1-46

### Ahab & Elijah: Will the real God please ... answer by fire?

#### Read 1 Kings 18.1-46

#### I / MAKING THE CONNECTION

- **Our attention will now turn to the northern kingdom of Israel [after the united kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon / see Lesson 3]. The first king of the southern kingdom of Judah was Rehoboam, son of Solomon. The first king of the northern kingdom of Israel was Jeroboam.**
  - This lesson will focus on the familiar and infamous King Ahab of Israel, husband of Jezebel.
  - We will also meet the well-known prophet **Elijah** as Yahweh brings him on the scene and into the narrative to deliver His messages to Israel – calling them to repentance and to return back to Him.
  - But, let's do this first ... let's trace a brief and summary record of those first kings of Israel, and who Ahab is, and where he came from...
1. **Jeroboam: he reigned 22 years / 1 Kings 14.20**
    - During the last years of his reign, God sent Ahijah the prophet to announce to Jeroboam that all of his descendants would be 'cut off' or slaughtered/massacred / **1 Kings 14.6-16** [wait for it...]
  2. **Nadab: son of Jeroboam / he reigned 2 years / 1 Kings 15.25** [the only son of Jeroboam to reign]
    - His short story is recorded in **1 Kings 14.20 & 15.25-26**.
    - **He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. / 15.26**
  3. **Baasha: from the tribe of Issachar / he reigned 24 years / 1 Kings 15.33**
    - **1 Kings 15.27 – 16.6:** Baasha murdered all the 'house'/family/descendants of Jeroboam. He gained the throne of Israel by assassinating Nadab, son of Jeroboam, thus fulfilling the prophecy delivered by the prophet Ahijah [see bullet point on Jeroboam above].
    - **He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin. / 15.34**
  4. **Elah: son of Baasha / he reigned 2 years / 1 Kings 16.8** [the only two kings of this family to reign]
  5. **Zimri: one of two of Elah's military commanders / he reigned all of 7 days / 1 Kings 16.15**
    - As one of Elah's two chief military commanders, he staged a coup, assassinated Elah, and declared himself king of Israel / **1 Kings 16.9-15**
    - His legacy: **"...and died, because of his sins that he committed doing evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for his sin which he committed, making Israel to sin." / 16.18-19**
  6. **Omri: the other of Elah's chief military commanders / he reigned 12 years / 1 Kings 16.23**
    - Not to be out-done by his rival, Zimri, he staged a counter-coup against Zimri and besieged Tirzah where Zimri was living. When Zimri saw he was doomed and to avoid being assassinated, he went into one of his fortresses and committed suicide by burning the house down over him / **1 Kings 16.15-20**
    - However, the northern kingdom was sub-divided again by internal civil war between two rivals, Omri and Tibni / **1 Kings 16.21**
    - Omri overcame Tibni and assumed sole reign over Israel / **1 Kings 16.22-28**
    - It was this Omri who bought the hill that would be named 'Samaria' and would be established as the long-lasting capital of Israel / **1 Kings 16.24**
    - **Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did more evil than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins that**

**he made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. / 16.25-26**

**7. Ahab: son of Omri / he reigned 22 years / 1 Kings 16.29**

- So, then, that brings us now to Ahab. He is introduced to us in **1 Kings 16.28-33**. Ahab was not content just to be compared with the sins of those who had come before him ... No! he had to out-do them all and set a new low standard for doing evil in the sight of Yahweh – to provoke Him to anger! Which he did! He didn't just lower the bar – he tried to dig down to the pits of Hell itself and plant the bar there! **“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him.” / 16.30**
- Here is some of what he did:
  - **“And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him” / 16.31** – So now we are also introduced to the infamous **Jezebel** ... who not only influenced Ahab, she also ruled over him and told him what to do. At her urging, he also introduced the worship of **Baal**, the god of the Sidonians into Israel. [*That is at the crux of our lesson story here...*]
  - **“He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.” / 16.32**
  - **“And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” / 16.33**

**Now, for the rest of our lesson, we will see how Yahweh responds to all this provocation:**

**II / “AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MORE...FOR THREE YEARS” ~YAHWEH / 1 Kings 17.1**

1. Yahweh sends Elijah [*his very name means: ‘YAHWEH is God’*] to announce to Ahab that He is going to withhold rain and dew for three years ... until He says otherwise! [see also **James 5.17**]
  - a. Yahweh makes this pronouncement to emphasize to Ahab that He, Yahweh, is still God and the God of Israel and over Ahab. He is sovereign over them. They are accountable to Him. He is in charge, and He is doing this! Also – He is giving Ahab opportunity to repent.
  - b. He sends this word by His faithful prophet Elijah. He speaks through Elijah to authenticate Elijah as His prophet / **see ch 18.36**
2. I have always been impressed by Elijah's statement: **“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand...”** – That is what each of us should do ... live and stand in the Presence of God, waiting for Him to give us instructions what He wants us to say and do!
3. NOTE: this drought Yahweh will send is not His whimsical, petty, or capricious vindictiveness – just because He has the power and authority to do whatever He wants to do. NO! Yahweh had warned them for centuries and generations that He would withhold rain and send drought upon them
  - a. ...as His judgment on their disobedience, idolatry, and breaking of faith/covenant with Him [see **Deuteronomy 11.13-17; 28.20-24**]
  - b. ...and to call them to return to Him with repentance [see **1 Kings 8.35-40; 2 Chronicles 6.26-31; 7.11-14**]

**III / “GO SHOW YOURSELF TO AHAB, AND I WILL SEND RAIN ON THE EARTH”  
~YAHWEH / 1 Kings 18.1-18**

1. **vv 1-2** / Yahweh decides it is time for Him to once again show Himself to Israel as their true God. He sends Elijah [*‘Yahweh is God’*] to make the announcement to Ahab.
2. **vv 3-15** / There is also this sub-story inserted here about Yahweh's faithful servant, Obadiah, who was also a kind of chief-of-staff for Ahab. **“Now Obadiah feared Yahweh greatly...”** [ch 18.3] He had already been engaged in secret missions to hide and feed Yahweh's prophets when Jezebel had engaged in a search-and-kill against them. *This would also put him in a tenuous place with Ahab.*

3. v 16 / Elijah sends Obadiah – and Obadiah goes to deliver the announcement to Ahab.

#### IV / SHOWDOWN AT MOUNT CARMEL / 1 Kings 18.19-40

- This is the real crescendo of this lesson and this story. There is going to be a showdown on the one of the mountain-tops of the Carmel range [this was a range of mountains in the NW corner of Israel just a few miles from the Mediterranean coast, extending into the valley of Jezreel].
- This showdown between Yahweh and the prophets of Baal will make the OK Corral one look like playtime at daycare!

#### Here's how it went down...

1. vv 19-20 / **THE CALL**: Elijah tells Ahab to call [**'send and gather to me at Mount Carmel'**] **'all Israel ... and the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.'** That last phrase means that the worship of Baal and Asherah had become the 'state-sponsored religion' of Israel under Jezebel's leadership ... and she was supporting and maintaining them.
2. v 21 / **THE CHALLENGE**: The people of Israel were 'halting' in indecision or 'limping' in their vacillation between Yahweh, whom they knew to be their true God, and the worship of Baal. But they were too weak-kneed and faithless to make the confession they knew they should make and stand up to Jezebel. The CHALLENGE was simple, and straight-forward, clearly-defined: **"If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."**
  - a. [This CHALLENGE is so reminiscent of the same challenge Joshua had made centuries earlier when they first entered the Promised Land in **Joshua 24.14-28**: **"Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."**]
3. vv 22-24 / **THE CONDITIONS** [or terms of the contest]: The conditions also were very simple – both Elijah and the prophets of Baal would each be given an altar, wood to burn, and a bull. Each of them would place their bull on their altars with the wood under it – but no fire. **"And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the Name of Yahweh, and the God who answers by fire, HE IS GOD!"**
  - a. Well, that should be proof enough, shouldn't it? Surely the God who is really God can show Himself and answer by sending down fire to recognize and accept the sacrifice that is made to Him! [*Besides, they believed their god Baal controlled thunder, lightning, and storms*]
  - b. **NOTE**: *God always delights in doing the impossible to show Himself to be God!* Like when He did the most impossible of all things ... He sent Jesus Christ into the world through the conception and birth by a virgin! **"For nothing will be impossible with God!" / Luke 1.37**
4. vv 25-26 / **THE CONTEST**: Elijah told the prophets of Baal to go first – he would eliminate the competition from the get-go. So, they did. They put no fire under their sacrifice per the conditions of the contest. They began to call on Baal – but, of course, **'But there was no voice, and no one answered'** ... because Baal is not really real – he just was not there! [see **Psalms 115.4-8 & 135.15-18**]
5. vv 27-29 / **THE CONTEMPT** Elijah heaped on them: Elijah mercilessly mocked, taunted, ridiculed the poor prophets of Baal as they futilely continued to rave and beg Baal to respond to them ... and as they began to cut themselves in self-sacrifice in the vain hopes of getting Baal's attention and

sympathy - **“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”**

6. **vv 30-38 / THE CONFLAGRATION** [OK, for the sake of continuing alliteration, this is just a big word that means a big fire that consumes everything it falls on]: Now it was Elijah’s turn – and more importantly, Yahweh’s turn!
- a. But first, Elijah had to re-build and repair the altar of Yahweh that the Baal prophets had torn down in their frustration and frenzy.
  - b. He took twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel to whom he was appealing – to show them that Yahweh was their covenant God.
  - c. Then he dug a trench around the altar deep enough to hold around four gallons of water ... because he was going to make this demonstration even more impossible to remove all doubt.
  - d. He put the wood on the altar and then laid the pieces of the bull sacrifice on the wood.
  - e. And then – *he did what?* – he gave instructions to go get water and pour it on the sacrifice and the wood ... to douse and soak the whole altar! And then, he did it the second time! And then, he did it the third time! until the water was not only soaking the altar, wood, and sacrifice, but it was filling up the trench around the altar! Everything was soaked with water ... to make it naturally inflammable! It would take Yahweh, the real God, to ignite this!
  - f. Then – Elijah prayed to Yahweh! In the English, it is only about 65 words – but Elijah was praying to Yahweh, the God of the impossible – the God who really lives and is there! **“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. <sup>37</sup> 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.”**  
[Remember: this was the CHALLENGE Elijah had presented to Yahweh and to Israel...]
  - g. And then – the conflagration fell from Yahweh! **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.**
7. **vv 39 / THE CONFIRMATION:** Yahweh confirmed by this physical response...beyond all doubt... that He, indeed, is Israel’s true God – and the only God there is! At least for this moment, the people of Israel who witnessed this confirmation confessed and acknowledged Him: **And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.”**
8. **vv 40-46 / THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SHOWDOWN:** There were two primary consequences ... [1] Elijah ordered that Jezebel’s false prophets of Baal be slaughtered – because they had been instrumental and influential in leading the people of Israel into their idolatry and away from Yahweh; and [2] Elijah then offered his prayer of faith to Yahweh to send rain again. James offers this example of fervent, believing prayer to God for us all to be encouraged to pray ourselves: **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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. / James 5.16-18**

**ONCE AGAIN, WE LEARN THAT YAHWEH HIGHLIGHTS THE FAILURES OF THESE MERELY HUMAN KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH ... AND THE CHRONIC FAITHLESSNESS OF THE PEOPLE ... TO TEACH US OUR NEED OF HIS COMING KING, JESUS CHRIST, AND THAT OUR SALVATION WILL BE FOUND ONLY IN HIM!**