

Who Is God? 1 kings Ch18:16-39

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Date: 28 April 2019

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Morning. It's quite a long section, but it's full of drama. It's a very exciting event that takes place on Mount Carmel.

So we're going to pick up the reading from 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 16. 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 16.

So let's hear God's word to us. We're going to read down to verse 39. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab then went to meet Elijah.

When Ahab 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 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

[1 : 19] 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?

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 450 prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces, 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 will 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. Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you.

[2 : 33] Call on the name of your God, but do not light the fire. So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon.

Baal, answer us, they shouted. But there was no response. No one answered. Now jump down to verse 30.

Then Elijah said to all the people, come here to me. They came to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. Elijah took 12 stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, your name shall be Israel.

With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he dug a trench around it, large enough to hold two seats of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces, laid it on the wood.

Then he said to them, fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood. Do it again, he said. And they did it again.

[3 : 45] Do it a third time, he ordered. And they did it a third time. And the water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed, Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all the things at your command.

Answer me, Lord. Lord, answer me. So these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again. Then fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God. Well, what a drama on the mountain.

Well, we're going to pray and then we're going to look at God's word together. Let's pray and ask for his help. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible.

We thank you for these events, these true historical events, which happened so many years ago but written down and recorded for us so we can learn about you and know what you are like.

[5 : 17] And we ask that you would give us understanding of your word and how it applies to us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, I want to start with a question. God is. How would you answer that question? God is.

Well, the Irish Times conducted a survey asking people that very question and here's what some of them responded with. One said, God is a person to me.

Another one said, If anything, God is disconnected at this point. A student answered, God is sovereign of the universe.

He has the right to tell us what to do because he is the creator. Another person said, God is asleep. When things go too far, maybe he'll wake up.

[6 : 22] God is what humans want to be. Another, God is me. Another student says, God is, there is no God.

God is everything around us. So it seems there is a variety of opinions as to who God is. But can we definitively know who God is?

Well, I think that's the big question being asked of the text, the reading we just had from 1 Kings. We're going to look at three things this morning.

Here's the first question we're going to ask. Who is the true God? Who is the true God? Remember what's been going on in the account of 1 Kings.

You might just flick back a couple of pages to the very end of chapter 16. And there we've been learning that Ahab is king over all of God's people.

[7 : 33] And as king, part of his leadership was to make sure that people worshipped only God. The God who loved them. The God who made them.

The God who had made promises to them. The God who entered into a relationship with them and was committed and loyal to them. But, and here's the problem.

Look at verse 31 of chapter 16. He, that is Ahab, not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel, daughter of Esbal, king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

Now, we might be used to Baal. But Baal at that time was the big God. The God of the weather. So if you wanted rain for your crops, well then you simply called on Baal.

And it would rain. So they hoped. But God was not going to let his people wander away from him. He was jealous for them. He loved them.

[8 : 48] God was like in a marriage relationship with them. He didn't want to let them go. So God confronted Ahab through his prophet Elijah.

Chapter 17, verse 1. Now Elijah, the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead, a prophet of God, said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except my word.

Chapter 18, verse 1. After a long time, in the third year, so three years later, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain to the land.

You see, God was sending a very clear message to Ahab and his people. There is only one true God.

There is only one God who controls the weather. The God who made everything and the God who rules everything. I am the God who provides all that you have.

[10 : 05] So worship me. Chapter 18, verse 2. So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab, and on his way, if we were to read on, Elijah meets this character called Obadiah, who is also a follower of God, and Elijah sends Obadiah to arrange a meeting with Ahab.

Let's pick it up again in verse 16. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab then went to meet Elijah.

When he saw Elijah, he said to him, Is that you, you troubler of Israel? You see, we've got to remember, the last time Elijah had met Ahab was when he had told him, God says no more rain for three years.

Now three years have passed, and there's been a terrible famine, and things are really difficult, Ahab is really angry, and so he's not best pleased to see Elijah.

But let's be clear whose fault it really is. Verse 18. Elijah says, Remember God's command?

[11 : 30] I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. It's not that there are lots of other gods. The Bible makes this exclusive claim, there is only one true God.

Here's a verse from Deuteronomy. Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God. In heaven above and on earth below, there is no other.

So God is making it abundantly clear that he is the only God. But it seems Ahab is of the opinion there are other gods.

He worships the Baals. You see, Ahab has not only rejected God, he's replaced God with his own gods. And isn't that exactly what we do?

We exchange the true God for our own gods. We mightn't have a little idol of Baal in our garden that we go and talk to and say, Gosh, don't like those clouds.

[12 : 46] Baal, could you remove those clouds and send a bit of sunshine? We mightn't do that. But we have got our own little God substitutes. Richard Keyes is an author and in a book called No God But God, he explains it like this.

Here's a quote. He says, When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing. We worship anything. We do not just eliminate God, we erect God's substitutes in his place.

So let me ask us all a question. Who or what is your God? What is your God? Well, I think there's two ways to help us to identify who our God is.

First, ask ourselves this question. What do I most fear losing in my life? What thing or person that you have in your life, if you lost it, if it was taken away from you, it would devastate you, it would break you?

What if your husband or your wife was taken away? Or what if tomorrow you went in and you discovered you had no more job? Or if you lost your health?

[14 : 13] What is the one thing that you most fear losing in your life? Another good question to ask is this.

What do you most want in your life? What occupies your mind when you wake up in the morning? Or as you lie in bed at night and everything else is gone, it's just you and your thoughts.

What is it that you think about and you most desire in your life? Is it more money? Is it deeper sexual pleasure?

What is it that you most want in your life? You see, whatever we fear losing, whatever we most want in our life, whatever occupies our thinking and our striving, that's your God.

that's what you worship. For Ahab, it was Baal. For us, it may be the God of money, the God of success, the God of sex, the God of body image.

[15 : 28] Well, Elijah has a plan. He arranges for all the people of Israel and all the prophets of Baal to come and meet them together on Mount Carmel.

Verse 20. So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and they assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Now, Mount Carmel wasn't just any ordinary hill in the area.

It was like the cathedral of Baal worship. This was Baal territory. This is kind of where he was. And this was going to settle things once and for all.

On this mountain, they were going to discover who the true God is. Verse 21. Elijah went before the people and said, How long will you waver between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing.

[16 : 37] They couldn't make up their minds. In other words, he's saying, Pick your God. Choose whoever and whatever you want. And when you've chosen your God, follow him.

But remember, the God of the Bible is an exclusive God. You can't pick your own God and then have the true God in case of an emergency.

So like, I'll forget about the God of the Bible, I'll have my own God, but if I get into trouble, I'll go and give him a call. No, choose the God you're going to follow.

And we can't have this different kind of God that we have on Monday to Saturday and then come Sunday we change to kind of the holy religious God. It doesn't work like that.

if the Lord is God, if the Creator God is God, follow him. But if Baal or your own God is God, well, follow him.

[17 : 43] Make your choice. You see, the God we choose is the God we're ultimately going to follow. The God that we desire, the things that we long for, the people that we most want, they're the ones and the things we're going to trust and submit our life to.

But be careful. Whoever we follow, whatever we follow, will demand our loyalty and demand our obedience and will want all of our time and our energies.

So who is it going to be? The point is, we all have a God that we worship. the question is, who is the real, true God?

Well, second, God is claiming that he's the true God. Well, how do we know who the true God is? How can we work that out? Well, let's go back to Mount Carmel because Elijah has a test.

We can call it the truth test, verse 23. Elijah says, get two bulls for us. Let the Baals, let the Baals prophets choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces, put it on the wood, but not set fire to it.

[19 : 08] And I will prepare the other bull and I'll put it on the wood, but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your God and I'll call on the name of the Lord and the God who answers by fire, well, he's your God.

And all the people said, sounds good to me, pretty obvious. But why fire? Why call down fire? I thought this was all about the rain that had stopped and the rain that was going to come and who controlled the weather. Well, fire was always a sign of power and the sign of presence of the God. fire. When fire showed up, certainly as we read through the Bible, God is present in power.

Remember the burning bush?

Remember the fire on the mountain as Moses went up to speak with God? Even for Baal worshippers, fire from heaven was a sign of power.

[20 : 13] fire. So the test was really simple. The God who answers by fire, he's the true God.

So the prophets of Baal go first. Verse 26, they took the bowl that was given to them, they prepared it, put it on this altar, and then they called on the name of Baal.

From morning, that's from about six in the morning, till noon. Baal, answer us! They shouted, but there was no response.

No one answered. They began to dance around the altar they had made. After six hours, noon, Elijah began to taunt them. Shout louder!

Surely he is a God. Perhaps he's deep in thought. Maybe he's planning out his day and you need to get his attention. Or perhaps he's busy.

[21 : 21] Literally, maybe he's sitting on the toilet. You need to go and get him. Or he's travelling, he's away on his holidays, maybe he'll come back later.

Or maybe he's sleeping and he's got to be wakened up. So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears as was their custom until their blood flowed.

Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time of the evening sacrifice. But there was no response.

No one answered. No one paid attention. attention. Four hundred and fifty prophets dancing for twelve hours on the go.

All getting worked up and blood pouring from their bodies. But at the end of it all, end of verse twenty-nine, no response. No one answered.

[22 : 23] No one paid attention. Baal doesn't answer because he doesn't have power. Baal doesn't answer because Baal doesn't exist.

Baal is just a name, an imagination, a made-up, make-believe God. When I was small, I used to wear a little black Zorro mask.

I put it on and I changed. I was invincible. It gave me powers like you never knew before. It even enabled me to swim.

I couldn't swim without it but put the Zorro mask on. I could swim. I could fend off baddies, fight sea monsters. I could do anything. But it's all made-believe.

And that's what our gods are like. It's like a mask. They're just imaginations. We have believed what Satan said to Adam in the garden right at the beginning of the story of the Bible.

[23 : 32] Satan came to Adam and said, you can be like God. You can be God. Forget about the true God. You be God and decide what's right and what's wrong.

And people ever since, we've all done it, we continue to fall into the same trap. The apostle Paul in the New Testament picks it up and he makes it crystal clear.

He says, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that we do not worship the true God. You see, the gods we make, whether I am God and see myself as God, or whether we think of nature as being God, or even if we say there is no God, it's all a lie.

Now Elijah steps up. And to demonstrate who the true God is, look what he does in verse 33. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces, laid it on the wood, then he said, fill four jars of water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.

Do it again, do it a third time, and they pour water on, gallons of water, all onto the altar, and everything is soaking wet. Have you ever tried to light a fire when everything is wet?

[24 : 59] I mean, if this is going to burn, it's going to need some fire. There's no tricks, there's no sleight of hand here. Verse 36, at the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed, Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, this is the promise-making, promise-keeping God, who says, I will be your God and you will be my people.

Let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant, have done all the things you have commanded. Verse 38, then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and it also licked up the water in the trench.

And when all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, the Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God.

I mean, it's utterly convincing. It's undeniable. And in case there are any doubts lingering, just jump ahead to verse 45, because remember, God had said no rain, and then he said he would bring the rain.

Verse 45, meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rainstorm came on, and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

[26 : 30] I mean, what more proof do we need? God said no rain, and there was no rain. God said let there be rain, and there was rain. God said let there be fire, and there was fire.

You see, the gods of our making are powerless. there is only one true God. Listen to the writer of Psalm 115.

I have it on the screen there. Why do the nation say, where is their God? Answer, our God is in heaven.

He does whatever pleases him, but their idols are silver and gold made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see, they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell, hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. There's only one true God, the God who made the heaven and the earth, who rules all things and all people.

[27 : 49] He is the God that we should worship. So, third question, what does this true God demand of us?

If God, the creator God, the God of the Bible, who makes promises and keeps them, what does this God demand of people like us? Well, to answer that, let's look just briefly at three things.

First, look at the way the prophets of Baal call on their God. Verse 26. They called on the name of Baal from morning till noon.

Baal, answer us, they shouted, but there was no response. no one answered, and then they danced around the altar they had made. They're simply just trying to get their God's attention, and when their God doesn't answer, then they just up the performance, don't they?

Verse 28. They get more excited. They shouted louder, and then they flashed themselves with swords and spears, and cut themselves until their blood flowed. Now isn't that what we think God sometimes demands of us?

[29 : 12] If I pray enough, if I'm ecstatic enough in my worship, then God will hear me and God will answer me. If I serve more, if I sacrifice more, if I give more money and give more of my time, if I stop doing bad things and start doing good things, then God will see my performance and he'll respond to me and he'll bless me.

Maybe we don't believe in this religious God at all, and we've got our own kind of God and we're striving after money and success and work and all that does is just demand more and more of our performance and do more and work harder and give more of your time and leave your family behind and just go and do your own thing.

And then things will be good. But all we're doing is cutting ourselves like the prophets.

We end up killing ourselves by our performances. In some cases, literally working ourselves to death. and we try and do so much.

If only I could pray more and read my Bible more, then God will bless me and do good things for me. You see, the true God does not answer us or respond to us on the basis of our performance. [30 : 48] That's not how God works. We're not singing our songs here today and doing what we're doing in the hope that God is going to listen to me. So how does God respond to us?

Well, it's not performance. Look at how Elijah comes. Verse 30. Then Elijah said to all the people, come here to me.

They came to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. Verse 32. With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord.

The altar of the Lord was the way God had prescribed for people to come to him. You see, to turn away from God to other gods, well, it would mean death and separation from God.

It would mean punishment. So through the sacrifice on the altar, reconciliation took place. The people could be reconciled to God.

[31 : 58] Look at Elijah's prayer, verse 37. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again.

Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice. Do you see what's going on here? As the fire came, the fire fell on the sacrifice.

The fire should have fallen on the people, instead it falls on the sacrifice. You see, sacrifice is what is required to know the true God.

Something or someone must take our place. Either the people are going to burn up or the sacrifice burns up. And isn't that the same for us?

Sacrifice must be made if we are to know and enjoy the true God. But here's the point. It's not our sacrifice.

[33 : 09] It's God's sacrifice. You see, the true God, who's spoken, who did all of these things, came to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus walked his life on the earth, people pointed and said, there's God. He did what only God could do. But not only was he God, he came to be the sacrifice for us.

He climbed the mountain to the mountain of crucifixion. He laid down his life on the altar of the cross and the fire from heaven fell on him.

The judgment of God fell on Christ. Christ took the punishment that we deserve for rejecting him as the one and only true God.

The separation that we deserve for ignoring God and living life on our own way. Christ took the blame for that. The fire should fall on us.

[34 : 13] But God takes the fire for us when Christ died on the cross. The wrath, the judgment of God fell on him. You see, the true God does not demand our performance.

The true God gives himself for us in sacrifice. sacrifice. He gives his life for us. So what does this God demand of us?

It's not performance. It's not sacrifice because God did the sacrifice. The only way to come to God is in repentance. Verse 37, which is really the key to this whole section.

look at his prayer. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again.

When we look at the God who sacrificed himself for me, who gave his life for me, then the only right response is to turn our hearts back again.

[35 : 29] That's what repentance is. Repentance means turning from going one way and turning to going the other way. Turning our backs on the things that we long for and the things we fear losing.

And instead we run to the true God who gives us what we've always needed and that we can never lose. The God who made us and who loves us and provides for us.

The God who listens to us. We don't have to shout and make a lot of noise for God to listen. He delights in listening to his children. The only way we will ever turn our hearts back to God is to gaze in wonder, not at the altar on Mount Carmel, but to look at the Mount of Crucifixion where Jesus Christ, the God man, died for us.

To gaze in wonder and look at the sacrifice of Jesus who died for me, who gave his life for me, so that we might know and enjoy this God.

Where fire no longer burns, but grace and mercy and love and generosity and kindness and compassion and eternal treasures to come are all ours because of what he did for us.

[36 : 56] Who is your God? We must follow our God, but be very careful. The God, the true God, is the one who gave his life for you.

to ignore that is to put our place self in the place of the fire. Or will we instead receive that forgiveness, that welcome and know him and enjoy him, the God who delights in us.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.
Let's pray