

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

1 Kings 18

The kingdom of Israel was divided into two nations following a foolish decision by Solomon's son, Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Judah, the Southern Kingdom, was ruled by Rehoboam while Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was ruled by Jeroboam. All of the Northern Kingdom's kings were wicked, but Ahab had the distinction of being the most wicked king of all (1 Kings 16:30, 33; 21:25-26). Together with his wife Jezebel, Ahab re-introduces the worship of Baal and the Asherah to Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33; also 1 Kings 11:1-8). She then begins to systematically kill off the prophets in hopes of eliminating completely the worship of Yahweh in favor of Baal. It's at this time that God intervenes through a prophet named Elijah.

Study the Text...

Elijah Confronts Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-24)

During the third and final year of the famine in the land God directed Elijah to present himself to King Ahab. As Elijah confronts Ahab he commands him to gather all of Israel at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah. Upon arrival Elijah challenges the people to make a decision about whom they will serve. He urges them to serve the one who truly is God. If Baal is God then the people should follow him. However, if the LORD ("Yahweh") is God then they should follow him. Apparently, the people of Israel were seeking to worship both Yahweh and Baal, therefore Elijah's initial challenge is answered with silence. No one says a word. The people are not about to commit themselves to one God or the other. Elijah then proposes a contest between the God of Israel and Baal. He purposely arranges the contest in such a way that the odds are completely against him. Not only is Mount Carmel regarded by the people as the sacred dwelling place of Baal but Elijah is outnumbered 450 to 1. From the perspective of the people of Israel it would be impossible to lose this contest! The rules are laid down. Each side is to prepare an altar and a sacrifice, without lighting the fire under it. Each side will call on its God (god) to consume the sacrifice with fire. The side whose God (god) answers by igniting the sacrifice is the one true God.

- What is the setting for Elijah's confrontation with Ahab? Why is this significant?
- Why does Ahab call Elijah the "troubler of Israel" in verse 17?
- What is the real reason for the trouble in the land?
- What do we learn about Jezebel in this passage of Scripture? How is she portrayed?

- Where did Elijah command Ahab's prophets and the people of Israel to meet him? Why did Elijah want to meet at this particular location?
- What accusation does Elijah bring against the people of Israel? How do the people respond?
- How many prophets opposed Elijah on Mount Carmel? Why is this significant? What was Elijah wanting to prove to the people?
- How will the prophets' of Baal know who the one true God is? Why is this particularly significant? (extrabiblical sources give evidence that Baal was thought of as a god who controls fire and lightning) Where else in Scripture have we seen the Lord associated with fire? (cf. Lev. 9:24, 10:2; Num. 16:35)

Group Discussion...

- It's easy to criticize the people of Israel for their idolatry and following Baal. However, the reality is that in many ways we are just as guilty as they. What current day "idols" do you often find yourself following?
- What's so appealing to you about those "idols"? What do they promise you? How do they offer you hope?
- What does this passage reveal about God and His character? Why is this important?

Study the Text

The Prophets' Failure (1 Kings 18:25-29)

All morning Baal's prophets call on their god and dance around his altar to arouse him to action. At noon Elijah begins to taunt them and sarcastically suggest that Baal is thinking about other things, or away on a trip, or even sleeping. When it was time for the evening sacrifice there was still no response.

- How long did the prophets call on their god?
- In what specific ways did the prophets attempt to gain the attention of their god? Were they successful? Which of their attempts do you find the most curious?
- How did Elijah respond to the prophets attempts to arouse their god to action?
- What does this passage reveal about the god these prophets served?

Group Discussion. . .

- Today there are also millions upon millions of people crying out to false gods who are unable to respond. Share a time when you witnessed man attempting to gain the attention of his god? How do people try to get the attention of their gods? What do they give their gods? What does what they give to their god say about what they value as most important?

- What does this scene reveal about the condition of all mankind?
- How does the God we serve (“Yahweh”) differ from the god of the prophets in this passage? What difference should this make in our lives?

Study the Text...

The Lord’s Victory (1 Kings 18:30-40)

At the time of the Israelites’ evening sacrifice, Elijah steps forward and prays. He doesn’t cry out with a loud voice or leap on the altar as the prophets of Baal did earlier, instead he addresses God with a simple prayer. He prays that God will hear his prayer so that the people will know that Yahweh alone is God, and so that His people will worship Him alone. He prays that the people will see that he has done all these things at the Lord’s command. He prays that they will know that it is God who has turned their hearts toward Him. Almost immediately, it would seem, God responds. He sends fire from heaven that consumes the bull and the wood, and the stones, the dust, and the water. The fire consumes absolutely everything! Yahweh wins the contest hands down. He demonstrates that He alone is the one true God. As the people recognize this reality they respond accordingly by falling on their faces and crying out “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.”

- What was the Lord’s motivation for answering Elijah’s prayer? Where else have we seen this truth in Scripture?
- Why did Elijah go to such extremes to make sure the entire area was saturated with water?
- How did the Lord answer Elijah’s prayer? What was remaining after the fire of the Lord fell?

Group Discussion...

- Contrast how Elijah approached the Lord with the prophets’ approach to their god? What does this teach us about the God we serve and how we should or should not approach Him? What does this teach about the character of the God we serve? What other passages in the New Testament address this issue? (see Matthew 6:7-13)
- What was the ultimate outcome of the prophets? Was this a just penalty or too severe?
- In what ways does Elijah foreshadow the role of Christ?
- At this point in redemptive history why is this event of Elijah and the prophets of Baal so significant?