

Prophets and Prayer

Study 2: 1 Kings 18:1 – 19:9

How can this study help me?

Sometimes the New Testament gives us our orientation and the application for reading the Old Testament stories. The book of James calls Elijah a “man just like us” who prayed (James 5:17, 18). This insight helps us to understand the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel in a different way.

There is no doubt that the details of Elijah’s “showdown” with the prophets of Baal are fascinating. It appears that Mt Carmel was a sacred site for Baal worship. But it becomes the place where God answers the prayer of his Prophet.

Our prayers are often impoverished by our self-centred obsession with God meeting our needs. But Elijah models prayer that has a large scope.

But you can easily lose sight of another mark of a big “P” Prophet – they pray and they are heard.

The Prophet – a person for a specific moment

Read 1 Kings 18:1-15.

- While Elijah was out of circulation, a fugitive in a foreign land, what had Obadiah been doing? (18:13).
- What was involved in Obadiah’s preservation of this number of prophets, over at least two years and in the midst of a drought?

Now read 1 Kings 18:16-40.

- Make a list all the participants on Baal’s Bluff (Mt. Carmel) and summarise what we today call “the rules of the engagement.”
- What is the tone and focus of Elijah’s first prayer (18:36-37)?
- Why does he pray, given that he had set the agenda from the outset?
- Elijah prays just once, standing up, and gets fire from heaven as an answer. Later, he climbs Baal’s Bluff again, makes 7 attempts at prayer and his posture is described as “face down between his knees” (18:41-44)? What might he have been praying for this time? (Hint: What does Daniel (9:1-10) persevere in praying for?)

Read 1 Kings 19:1-9. Ironically, Elijah’s apparent success on Baal’s Bluff only leads him to become a fugitive again.

- How is Elijah’s third prayer (19:4) so different from the previous two?
- How do you explain the tone of this prayer?

What about us – here and now?

Like the Prophet Elijah, Jesus prays in a variety of ways and always heaven responds (Luke 3:21-22; Matt. 26:36-46; John 11:38-44).

- What is the significance of there always being an immediate answer to Jesus' prayers during his time on earth?
- Today we often characterise a prophet simply as someone who claims to bring a word from the Lord. Why don't we require that anyone who brings a prophecy also show evidence of having prayers answered?

So what can I do?

- At the same time, God has both Obadiah and Elijah operating for him. Obadiah is not a prophet, but a bureaucrat. What spiritual principle is demonstrated in this story? (cf. 1 Cor. 12:29-13:13).
- Elijah prays that God would show his power over and against the prophets of Baal. Have you ever prayed that false prophecy of all sorts would be clearly revealed for what it is?
- It appears that on Baal's Bluff, Elijah persevered in praying for the forgiveness of the sins of his nation until it rained. When James reminds us of this episode he talks about a ministry of intercession for sins (James 5:16-20). Have you interceded for the consequences of those who are sinning?