

Life Lesson 81
The God Contest
Text: I Kings 18

Introduction

The prophet Elijah came out of hiding, and wicked King Ahab was out to get him.

Elijah had prayed that God would hold back the rain, and God did just that. It hadn't rained for three whole years. The crops died, the animals starved to death, and the people were starving, too.

King Ahab tried his best to find Elijah and kill him, but God protected him. First, the birds brought him food and he drank water from a little stream. When the stream dried up, God sent him to the city of Zerephath. A widow there was just about to fix the last of her food. She obeyed God and shared with Elijah. God made the little bit of meal and oil last for many more months.

The Story

Now, God told Elijah to go back to Israel, even though King Ahab was still mad at him. At last, they met.

"Are you the one who has caused Israel all this trouble?" King Ahab said.

"Not me," Elijah replied. "You are the one who caused this trouble because you have forgotten the Lord and you don't obey His commandments. Because you have led Israel to sin against God, He has sent this trouble to the land."

Ahab wasn't convinced, so Elijah suggested a contest – a god contest.

"Go call the 450 prophets of Baal," Elijah said. "We'll have a little contest."

Ahab called the prophets together. The people of the land gathered around, too, to see what was going on.

"How long will you go back and forth?" Elijah asked the people. "If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal is god, follow him."

The people didn't know what to say. They just stood there.

“I am the only prophet of the Lord here,” Elijah said. “And there are 450 prophets of Baal. But, I don’t care. Let’s put our gods to the test.

“Here’s the plan. Bring us two cows,” he said. “You choose one and give the other to me. We will each cut up our cow and put it on wood. You call upon Baal, and I will call on the Lord. The one who sends fire to burn up the offering will be the true God.”

“Good idea,” the people said.

“You go first,” Elijah said.

The prophets of Baal prepared the sacrifice on the wood.

“Here us, O Baal,” they cried. They kept it up all morning until noon. Nothing happened.

Then they began to get desperate. They jumped on the altar and yelled.

Elijah poked fun at them.

“Yell louder,” he suggested. “Maybe Baal is talking to someone else and doesn’t here you. Or maybe he has gone on a trip. Maybe he’s sleeping. Yell louder and wake him up.”

They yelled louder and jumped higher. Then they took knives and cut themselves to show Baal they were serious. They kept it up all day, but Baal didn’t answer.

He couldn’t answer. Baal wasn’t a real god.

Then it was Elijah’s turn. He took twelve stones and made an altar with them. Then he dug a ditch around the altar.

He piled up the wood and laid the sacrifice on it.

“Fill up four barrels of water and pour it on the sacrifice and on the wood,” Elijah said.

Wet wood won’t catch on fire, but Elijah didn’t care. He knew that God can do anything.

“Do it again,” he said. “Do it a third time.”

By that time the sacrifice was soaking wet and so was the wood. The ditch around the altar was filled up with water.

Then Elijah came before the Lord. He didn't scream and yell or cut himself with knives. He just said, "Hear me, O Lord, that this people may know that you are the Lord God."

The fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice. It burned up the wood and even licked up the water that was in the ditch.

When the people saw it, they fell down on the ground and cried, "The Lord, He is the God! The Lord, He is the God!"

Elijah turned to King Ahab.

"Get ready," he told the king. "It's going to rain."

It hadn't rained for three years – but now the sky was black with clouds, and there was a great rain. The drought was over!

But Ahab was still mad – and his wife, Jezebel was even more mad. She sent a messenger to Elijah.

"I'm going to kill you," she said.

So Elijah had to run for his life again.

Elijah knew something that Ahab and Jezebel didn't know. He knew that God is real. He isn't just an idea, or a story. He is the true and living God. He can do anything.

The Life Lesson

I hope each of you realize that, too. You shouldn't put God to the kind of test Elijah did, unless God gives you specific instructions to do it, as he did Elijah. But, you can put God to the test by trusting Him with your life. He is real and living. He can do whatever He pleases. Nothing is too hard for God to do.

Review Questions

How long did the drought (no rain) last?

Three years

What did Elijah suggest to Ahab?

A God contest.

How many prophets of Baal were there?

450

How many prophets of God were there?

Just one -- Elijah

What did the prophets of Baal do to get him to set fire to their sacrifice?

They jumped and screamed and cut themselves.

Did Baal light the fire under his offering?

No, because Baal wasn't a real god.

What did Elijah do to the sacrifice before asking God to set fire to it?

He poured water over it.

Who won the God contest?

God answered Elijah's prayer and set fire to the sacrifice.

What did Jezebel say about that?

She told Elijah she would kill him.