

God's Story – Our Story

Characters and Character – Elijah and the Majority of One

April 28, 2024

Overarching Theme: 2024 – A Year in God's Story

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2024 can be a year of living into God's Story as we journey from Genesis to Revelation together.

Reflect on this Scripture:

1 Kings 18:20-39 (NRSV) ²⁰So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel.²¹Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. ²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. ²³Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" ²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." ²⁶So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. ²⁷At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." ²⁸Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. ²⁹As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response. ³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down; ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall

be your name"; ³²with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. ³³Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, ³⁵so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water. ³⁶At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. ³⁷Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God."

Commentary: King Ahab and his wife Queen Jezebel "served" and "worshipped" Baal, the fertility god who purportedly controlled the weather, and led Israel into overt polytheism (the Lord *and* Baal). To challenge this heresy, Prophet Elijah called for a cessation of rain by the word of the Lord. Strikingly, during the ensuing multi-year drought there is no reference to the king, the queen or any of the prophets of Baal seeking relief from their supposedly powerful 'god' of storms and fertility.

As the drought becomes increasingly severe, Ahab and Elijah finally meet and Ahab blames Elijah for these troubles in Israel; Elijah countered that the troubler was Ahab (1 Kings 18:17-18). Elijah instructed Ahab to assemble "all Israel," for a showdown at Mount Carmel between the 450 prophets of Baal and the one public prophet of the Lord left – Elijah (the rest have either been executed by Jezebel or are in hiding).

When the crowd gathers at Carmel, Elijah approaches the people and asks: "how long will you go limping with two different opinions" – Baal or the Lord? No one in the crowd responds. Perhaps the people are frightened in the presence of King Ahab and the Baal prophets or perhaps they don't know how to pick. Elijah then proposes a spiritual contest – that the "God" who answers a specific prayer – to ignite and consume one of two slain, sacrificial bulls – would be declared the victor. The crowd enthusiastically concurs and the contest begins.

First, the prophets of Baal cry out for hours in dramatic fashion for Baal to "answer by fire," to no avail. Finally, while the Baal prophets continued their

appeals – Elijah invites all the people to “come near” to him. Elijah builds an altar of twelve stones “in the name of the LORD,” invoking the name of God revealed at Mount Horeb: *Yahweh*, “I AM WHO I AM” (or “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE; Exodus 3:14). Elijah’s actions connect the scene at Mount Carmel with the God who delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and established with them a covenant through which they could live with one another as “a royal priesthood and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). He then has his bull and altar thoroughly saturated to emphasize the coming powerful answer that the LORD would give.

The fervent appeals by the prophets of Baal continued until “the time of the offering of the oblation” (1 Kings 18:29). Alas, “no sound, no answer, and no response.” At that time Elijah “drew near” and began his appeal to the “LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” (verse 36). Elijah begins by asking the LORD to make known “this day that you are God in Israel.” This is strikingly personal and local. He calls upon the LORD to answer him so that “*this* people may know” and “*their* hearts” may be turned back to God.

This story the offers this powerful conclusion:

³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD indeed is God; the LORD indeed is God.”

-Adapted from online commentary by Elna Solvang

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. By worldly standards King Ahab and Queen Jezebel’s reigns were prosperous and powerful, but according to prophets like Elijah, their spiritual policies were bankrupt. Why would the prophetic assessment carry so much more weight to the author of 1 Kings?
2. Why would the polytheism (the worship of the LORD *and* Baal) supported by Ahab and Jezebel be attractive to some Israelites?
3. Why do you think the people were silent when Elijah asked them to choose between the LORD and the fertility god Baal?
4. In this particular context, Baal prophets outnumbered the LORD’s prophet 450 to 1. Why is truth not subject to popular support?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
1 Kings 18:37-38 ³⁷Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.