



11

God Uses Elijah

Key Theme

- God alone is to be worshipped.

Key Passage

- 1 Kings 18:1–46

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Contrast the actions of the priests of Baal with Elijah's actions.
- Describe how God demonstrated His power over Baal.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

page 4

Write on the board, "Is it good to be jealous?"

Students will place paper strips at 1 Kings 18.

Students will practice the memory verse by unscrambling the words on the activity sheet and then reciting the verse to each other or to the class



Studying God's Word

page 4

God sent the prophet Elijah to challenge wicked King Ahab and the prophets of Baal in order to demonstrate the power and identity of the true God. The prophets of Baal could not call down fire on their sacrifice. But Elijah's sacrifice was consumed, and the people bowed in worship to the almighty, one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Read 1 Kings 17–19.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: A Jealous God

page 8

Students will examine the notion of God's jealousy and what Scripture says about the connection between idolatry and God's jealousy.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

Today's lesson is about another prophet of God. God used prophets throughout the Old Testament to send messages of encouragement, judgment, warning, and to perform miracles in His name to show His glory! The prophet Elijah ministered, like Jonah, to the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He had a powerful ministry in spite of the turmoil, the victories, the defeats, and the depression he often endured (1 Kings 17–19).

Through Elijah we come to know that God is a jealous God. When we hear the word jealous, we often think it refers to being envious of someone—wanting something they have for ourselves. We tend to consider jealousy a sinful reaction. So when we hear that God is jealous (Exodus 34:13–14), we wonder what it means. God cannot sin, nor does anyone physically possess anything He would want, since everything belongs to Him (Psalm 50:12). His jealousy is not the sinful jealousy we often consider. So what is it? God's jealousy is a desire for His own glory! God's jealousy is provoked when we worship anything above Him. In the Bible, His jealousy is related to idolatry (Exodus 20:4–5, 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:23–24, 5:9, 32:21; Joshua 24:19–20). As the Creator, God is the only one who rightly deserves to be worshipped. As the Creator, He is righteous in His jealousy to be exclusively worshipped, and those who bow down to other gods will surely face His wrath.

Elijah knew that there is one true God and that He alone is to be worshipped. But at that time, King Ahab and his wife Jezebel ruled over Israel in Samaria. Ahab worshipped the false god Baal, built a temple, set up an altar to Baal in the temple, and erected wooden images to worship (1 Kings 16:31–33). In fact, Ahab did more to provoke God's anger than any other king of Israel (1 Kings 16:33). And God would reveal His jealousy when Ahab promoted pagan worship. Into this idolatrous environment God sent Elijah, who stood before

King Ahab and pronounced that the Lord God of Israel would stop the rain and cause a severe drought in the land (1 Kings 17:1).

God did not spare Elijah from this drought but did care for him in supernatural ways—first at the Brook Cherith where he found water to drink and food from ravens sent from God (1 Kings 17:3–4). And then God sent him to Zarephath, a city on the Mediterranean Sea, to a widow who was commanded to provide for the prophet of God (1 Kings 17:9–10). Although destitute, she was able to do so by God's miraculous mercy and grace (1 Kings 17:11–14).

God eventually sent Elijah back to challenge Ahab and the 850 false prophets who worshiped pagan gods (1 Kings 18:1, 18:18–19). Elijah persuaded King Ahab to assemble with the false prophets and all Israel at Mount Carmel for God's determined confrontation. There, he asked the Israelites, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

Altars were built, sacrifices were prepared, but the challenge was to be the fire. Whoever would answer the plea for fire to burn the sacrifice was the true God (1 Kings 18:24). The Baal worshippers called, danced, leaped, howled, and cut themselves with knives and lances—but to no avail. The one true God would not allow them to succeed (1 Kings 18:26–29). He was restraining the demons behind the inanimate idols. The priests' efforts were futile.

Now Elijah was prepared to show the power and glory of the true Creator God. The altar was prepared, and lest anyone doubt God's authority, Elijah ordered that four pots of water be poured onto the sacrifice and over the wood. This was done three times! Even the trench around the altar was filled with water (1 Kings 18:33–35).

Elijah cried out to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob). Then, the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water that was in the trench. The people fell to the ground and proclaimed that the Lord, He is God (1 Kings 18:38–39).

At Elijah's command the prophets of Baal were seized and executed at the Brook Kishon (1 Kings 18:40). This fulfilled God's law that any false prophet should be killed (Deuteronomy 13:5). And as Elijah prayed to the Lord from the top of Mount Carmel, a cloud appeared and the drought ended with heavy rainfall.

In Israel, it was evident that Baal was nothing and that God was everything. God is not mocked. His truth will prevail, and the whole world will one day know that He is God, the only true God, and that salvation comes only one way—through His Son Jesus Christ, crucified on a Cross and raised again to life!

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Elijah had a long ministry in both the northern and southern kingdoms. He was born in Israel and is said to have come from Tishbe (1 Kings 17:1). As God's prophet, Elijah was called to fulfill many different roles. He delivered messages of national judgment because of idolatry and messages of judgment to individual leaders. His ministry was affirmed by the working of many miracles. These signs were a mark of the authenticity of Elijah's work on behalf of God. He stopped the rain (1 Kings 17:1), raised the dead (1 Kings 17:22), called fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), and performed other signs.

Elijah ministered during the early part of the divided kingdom, a time when there was rampant idolatry in Israel and Judah. As he constantly called the tribes back to worship Jehovah, he faced a religious system that was based in works and superstition rather than in truth. The demonic influence in the religious systems of the Gentile nations was obvious and was a constant cause for judgment against Israel and Judah. God used the nations surrounding the two kingdoms to bring judgment on the people.

Elijah was one of the earliest of the prophets proclaiming to the Israelites the message of repentance and reconciliation with God, but that message would

be repeated by others over the next several hundred years. The Jews did not remain faithful to God as a nation, but they repeatedly involved themselves in spiritual adultery with other gods—the idolatry that is still present in all other religions today. And as we look at the world around us, and our own hearts, the words of John Calvin ring true: "From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols" (Institutes Book I.XI.8). 1 Corinthians 10:14 warns us to "flee from idolatry." God alone is worthy of praise and deserves first place in our hearts.

God is faithful, and as He did in Elijah's time (1 Kings 19:18), He will always reserve a remnant who worship Him in truth and who declare His Word to the next generation. Remember that this is your task as you teach your students.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Blessed are you, Lord! I rejoice in your power and might and recognize that you alone are worthy to be worshipped. Nothing is too difficult for you. You are great in power and mighty in deed. Help me to remember that although my desire is for an undivided heart, sometimes my heart is prone to wander. When that happens, Holy Spirit, convict me, so I confess quickly and turn back to you. As I teach this lesson, help me to point out your omnipotence. There is no one like you. Help me and my students to grow in faith until we are able to trust you to do the impossible. And Lord, for those students who don't know you, draw them to yourself. Convict them of their sins, so they long for forgiveness and a newness of life that only you can provide, through Jesus Christ.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark their Bibles at 1 Kings 18 with a strip of paper.
- They will say the memory verse after they unscramble the words on the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided an activity sheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. Students should unscramble the letters of the missing words and then recite the verse to you or another student. Each week the verse will get harder to unscramble. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



Review

Last week, we saw how God used an imperfect person to accomplish His plans to bring the people of Nineveh to repentance. Jonah acted in direct defiance to God, but God still chose to use him to preach the gospel. We are really no different than Jonah—we have many shortcomings, but God still uses us to accomplish His plans in the world. In the account of Jonah, we see God’s mercy displayed to one of His children rebelling against His authority, as

well as His mercy on the people of a pagan nation who repented of their wickedness.

Today, we will hear of another prophet God used to demonstrate His power and authority over His creation. Elijah appears during the period of the divided kingdom, and he ministered primarily to the 10 tribes in the north, Israel, but travelled through Judah as well.



➤ Write on the board, “Is it good to be jealous?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

1 Kings 17

Turn to 1 Kings 17 and let’s get a little background on Elijah. In chapter 17, we see Elijah before King Ahab. Ahab was king from 918–897 BC. He had abandoned God, along with his wife Jezebel, and turned to serve the false god Baal. In verse 1, Elijah first appears on the pages of Scripture, cursing Israel with a drought. Then, God sent him from Samaria, the capital of Israel, to the Brook Cherith. While there, God sustained Elijah by sending ravens with food and by supplying water in the brook.

Then God sent Elijah to a city on the Mediterranean coast, Zarephath (17:9), where he stayed with a widow whose jars of flour and oil never ran empty during the drought (17:16). When the widow’s son died, Elijah

raised him from the dead (17:22). That brings us up to where we will begin reading today.

Let's read 1 Kings 18:1–40 together. *Divide the passage to be read aloud by several students.*

1 Kings 18:1–40

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **How long had it been since Elijah confronted Ahab and announced the drought?** *Three years.*
- ? **How can we confirm this timeframe?** *Since Scripture interprets Scripture, other passages can be used to confirm this. Hopefully, students will look to their cross-references where Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 will be noted. Both of these passages give the period of drought as three years and six months. It is likely that "the third year" in 18:1 refers to the famine or the time since he had been in Zarephath, not simply the time since the rain had stopped.*
- ? **What act had Obadiah done in Elijah's absence?** *He had hidden 100 prophets from Jezebel and sustained them in the caves so they were not killed.*
- ? **Why was Obadiah afraid to deliver the message to Ahab?** *Ahab had been earnestly looking for Elijah.*
- ? **How did Ahab refer to Elijah when they met?** *As the "troubler of Israel."*
- ? **How did Elijah respond to that accusation?** *He turned the tables to call Ahab the one who had brought the trouble on Israel.*
- ? **What did Elijah identify as the source of Israel's troubles?** *Ahab had forsaken the commandments of the Lord and served the Baals.*
- ? **What did Elijah command Ahab to do?** *To gather the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel.*
- ? **When the people were gathered, what decision did Elijah ask them to make (v. 21)?** *To decide whether they would follow God or Baal.*
- ? **What other event in Israel's past does this question echo?** *As Joshua brought the people into the Promised Land, he offered a similar challenge to the Israelites: serve the true God or serve the Egyptian or Amorite gods.*
- ? **As the showdown between the 850 false prophets and Elijah began, he allowed them to pick a bull and prepare a sacrifice with wood, but what did he forbid them from using?** *Fire to light the sacrifice.*

➤ Cross-references help us confirm the truths in Scripture.

Joshua 24:14–17

Historical context is often important in fully understanding a passage of Scripture. Baal was supposed to be in control of the weather of the region. However, Baal was not able to end the three-year drought that Elijah had proclaimed. Baal was supposed to be in charge of the lightning, so starting a fire for this sacrifice should have been an easy task for this god.

OMNISCIENT

OMNIPRESENT

OMNIPOTENT

? **How does that piece of historical information enhance the understanding of this showdown?** *It makes sense that they would ask Baal to start a fire since he was supposed to be in control of the lightning. If he was the god of the sea, for example, that would not make sense.*

? **What acts did the prophets undertake to bring the fire from heaven?** *They cried out with loud voices until noon, but there was no response. Then they danced around and finally resorted to cutting themselves.*

? **Why were they doing all of these things?** *To try to get the attention of Baal.*

? **Look at verse 27. How did Elijah respond to the failure to burn the sacrifice?** *Elijah mocked them and their false god by pointing out his limitations. He gave several distractions Baal might be experiencing. One of the statements, translated "he is busy," is a figure of speech for using the bathroom (as the ESV translates it: "relieving himself").*

? **Are any of these ideas true of the Lord God?** *No, He is not distracted or unable to engage in everything happening in the universe simultaneously—He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent.*

? **In verse 29, what word is repeated and what is the intent?** *"No" is repeated three times to make it perfectly clear that there was no power behind the idea of Baal.*

By around three o'clock, the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah was ready to show everyone who was the one true God of the universe.

? **Starting at verse 30, Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord. What was significant about selecting 12 stones?** *The 12 stones represented the 12 tribes God had brought into the Promised Land. They had received the Word of God but had abandoned it to pursue false gods.*

? **How did Elijah make it clear that there were no tricks involved in bringing the fire to the sacrifice?** *He had them drench the wood with water three times.*

Listen to verses 36 and 37 again. *Read the verses aloud.*

? **How did Elijah identify God?** *As the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.*

? **What four desires did Elijah indicate in his prayer ("let it be known")?** *1) That the people would know God is the God of Israel (repeated twice); 2) that the people would know Elijah is God's servant; 3) that the people would know that Elijah had done things according to God's word; 4) that it was God who would turn the hearts of the people back to Him.*

? **When Elijah said that he wanted the people to know that he had done "all these things," what things was he referring to, and why was this important?** *The immediate context is of calling for the miracle of the fire, but his previous actions of calling for the drought and raising the widow's son are also in mind. The miracles authenticated the message of the prophet. The people knew they could trust that Elijah was speaking on behalf of God because of the miracles performed through him.*

? **When Elijah finished praying, what was the result?** *God sent fire that consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and all the water.*

? **How did the people respond?** *The people responded by falling on their faces and proclaiming, "The Lord, He is God!"*

- ? **Why was the phrase repeated?** *For emphasis to make it clear that they recognized God's authority.*
- ? **How did Elijah deal with the prophets of Baal?** *He had the people execute the prophets.*
- ? **Why was this an appropriate response?** *The prophets had incited the people to worship false gods, so they were worthy of death. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 makes this clear. Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Deuteronomy 13:1–5

Discover the Truth

God displayed His absolute authority over nature, life and death, and the hearts of the people through Elijah. God's power was on display over the supposed gods of the Canaanites. Baal and Asherah were not gods in an absolute sense. They had no absolute power to control anything. However, there were likely demonic forces that were manipulating those who were involved in this worship. But those demons had no authority or power unless God had allowed it. We see that idea clearly communicated in the opening chapter of Job.

The Apostle Paul also made this clear as he discussed the idol worship, and the demons behind them, in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6 and 10:19–20. *Read these passages if time allows.* God is sovereign over all of His creation, and nothing called a god or calling itself a god can act outside of God's plan.

While the worshippers of Baal tried to dance and scream and cut themselves to get the attention of their god, all Elijah had to do was speak to God. That might be a trap we fall into sometimes—thinking that we have to get God's attention before He will listen to us. But we have direct access to the Father through the Son. Because of what Christ has done on our behalf, we can boldly approach the throne of grace to find help from God (Hebrews 4:16). Because of what Christ has done on our behalf, we have “boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:12).

When we know who God is and trust in Him, as Elijah did, we can go to Him and trust that He will work things according to His plans. As we do this, we worship God and recognize His authority, acting in faith and fully trusting in Him.

- ? **Why was God so concerned about the worship of Baal and Asherah?** *God had clearly commanded people to worship Him alone. The first three of the Ten Commandments make this clear. God alone is to be worshipped.*

Our activity today will explore this idea a bit further.



SOVEREIGN

1 Corinthians 8:4–6,
10:19–20



A Jealous God

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

When we hear people talking about jealousy, we typically have a negative connotation in mind. We teach our kids not to be jealous, but God seems to be acting in a jealous manner when He won't allow the Israelites to worship other gods.

Many people confuse jealousy with envy. Envy involves wanting something that's not yours. Jealousy involves not tolerating rivalry or unfaithfulness, and being vigilant in guarding what is yours. God is jealous in that He does not tolerate idolatry, and is protective of His people. God is not envious; He is jealous.

In your Student Guides, you will find the activity for today, A Jealous God. Examine the passages and answer the questions and we will discuss them in a few minutes. *Help the students as needed.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's discuss what you found in these passages. *Review the passages and discuss the answers to the questions.*

Exodus 20:1–5: *God is jealous toward idol worshippers and will punish them.*

Deuteronomy 4:23–24: *God is jealous of the covenant He has made with Israel and of their worship.*

Deuteronomy 5:9, 6:15: *God is jealous toward those who worship idols and will punish them.*

Nahum 1:2: *God avenges because of His jealousy.*

1. Does God describe Himself as jealous? *Yes.*

2. Can God sin? *No.*

3. Is God's jealousy sinful? *No.*

4. What is the connection between jealousy and idolatry in these passages? *God is constantly speaking of how He is jealous for the worship of people. Idolatry provokes God to jealousy because what rightly belongs to God is being given to a carved image or a false god.*

5. What makes God's jealousy distinct from the type of jealousy we have as God's creatures? *God deserves to be worshipped as the Creator. His people, His creatures, do not deserve to be worshipped. When His creatures direct their worship toward something He has made or to ideas they have created in their minds, He is righteously jealous and righteously angry. When we get jealous, it is often because we think we deserve to get the attention (worship) of someone else and we are not receiving it.*

6. Is jealousy ever acceptable in people? *If the attention we are seeking is rightfully and righteously due to us, then jealousy can be acceptable. For example, a husband can be righteously jealous of the affection of his wife. If she offers that affection due only to him (e.g., sexual affection) to another person, then his jealousy is justified. How he responds to that jealousy is where sin often enters the picture. However, God is never unrighteously jealous since all worship rightly belongs to Him. We can also be jealous for God's honor if we see others not giving Him the honor due His name (See 2 Corinthians 11:2–3).*

God is jealous as He seeks to protect His own honor and receive the worship from His creatures that is due to Him alone. We read in Isaiah 42:8, God saying, "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images." And Isaiah 48:11 says, "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another."



READ THE WORD

Let's wrap up our passage by reading how God continued to demonstrate His power in 1 Kings 18:41–46. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

1 Kings 18:41–46

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What was Elijah doing at the top of Mount Carmel? *He was praying with his head bowed between his knees.*
- ? From the context, can we know what was he praying for? *For the drought to end and for God to send rain.*
- ? Look at James 5:17–18 again. Does this confirm or deny our answer to what he was praying for? *It confirms that Elijah was praying for rain.*
- ? What appeared the seventh time the servant looked out to sea? *A cloud appeared on the horizon.*
- ? What happened soon after? *Heavy rain.*

James 5:17–18

Discover the Truth

Mount Carmel is situated near the coast, so from the top of the mountain, the approaching storm clouds could be clearly seen. This is another authentication of Elijah's message as well as God's authority over the "sky god" Baal. God was in control over the weather, not Baal. Elijah was a true prophet, not the prophets of Baal.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

There are many false gods masquerading as God, but the Lord God, *Yahweh Elohim*, is the true God who has authority over all that He has created. That authority extends to the demons and false ideas that men set up in place of God and worship. Baal had no power to bring a fire to the altar despite the raucous display of screaming and bloodletting put on by his prophets. Elijah knew this truth and displayed the power of God, calling the fire to consume the waterlogged sacrifice. But God did more, even burning up the rocks and dust of the altar.

The people responded rightly—they acknowledged God's authority. All worship belongs to God alone. While we don't carve little statues, we often

offer the affection and praise that is due to God to other people or pursuits. We worship the creation rather than the Creator (Romans 1:20–25).

People in Bible times continued to resist God’s authority and failed to offer Him worship even in the presence of miracles. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many failed to worship Him, walking away in unbelief (John 11:43–48). Examining the attributes of God clearly seen in the creation, people reject the Creator. They worship the natural process or various parts of the order seen in nature rather than directing worship where it belongs—to the Creator God.

“To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 25).

GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Many people say that if God were to come down and do a miracle for them, like sending fire to consume a soaking-wet sacrifice, they would believe in God. How would you respond to someone making such a claim? *Many people say that if God did miracles like He did in the past, they would believe. However, there are many examples in the Bible of people who witnessed miracles and still rejected God’s truth. The gospel must be brought to bear, using God’s standard of perfection to show them their sin and offering the hope of forgiveness in Christ.*
- ? **What religions would you consider to be grounded in idolatry?** *Buddhism and Hinduism (which are often blended together) are probably the two most popular religions that would worship various carved or molded images. Many other animistic and tribal religions worship idols in the form of animals and various images. Any person who offers prayers and praise to an image or a person other than God is committing idolatry.*

? God is the only one in the universe who deserves to be worshipped. If idolatry is offering honor or reverence to something other than God, what forms does idolatry take in our society? *Anything that we give our worship (affections) to, like sports, money, power, health, etc., rather than directing that affection toward God. Even good things like our families can become idols if we allow them to replace God as the center of our lives and worship.*

? What does idolatry look like in your life? *Discuss various answers.*

? What is the remedy for idolatry? *We only have hope in the gospel, knowing that Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins. We must repent of idolatry and turn to Christ, trusting in Him alone and worshipping Him alone.*

? How does knowledge of who God is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—help us to direct our worship toward God alone? *As we study about God from the Scriptures, His attributes displayed and rightly understood should lead us to praise Him—the Father for His wisdom, the Son for His sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit for His guidance.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Chronicles 29:10–11 Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: “Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing Himself as powerful and worthy of worship.
- Praise God for His power over His creation.
- Ask God for the strength to flee from all forms of idolatry.

