

The Life and Times of Elijah the prophet (1Kings 17 – 2 Kings 2)

Week 1: Elijah announces himself and spends three years in hidden obscurity, while there is drought

Week 2: Elijah contests with the prophets of Baal and is victorious and then flees for his life

Week 3: Elijah encounters God who speaks to him in a still small voice and is given further orders

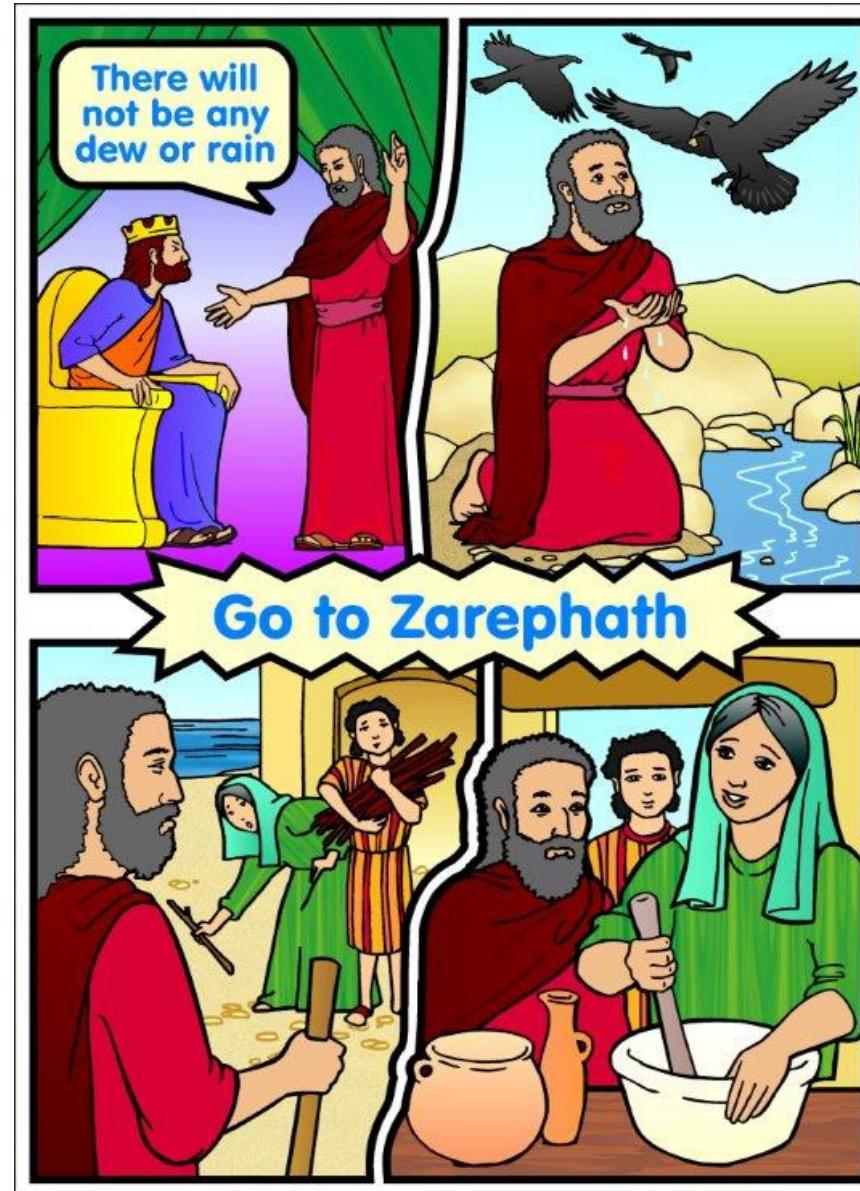
Today's reading: 1Kings 18:1 – 1Kings 19:3a

Elijah the prophet speaks to Ahab the king



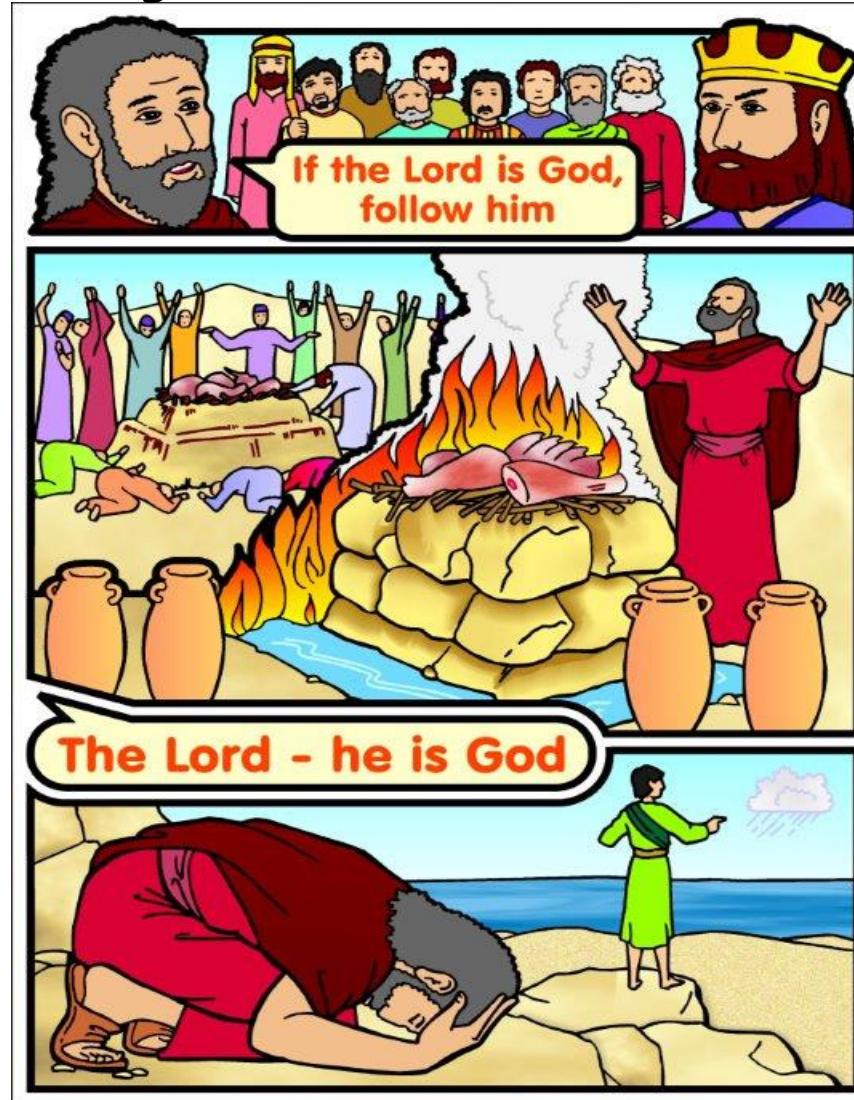
A Prophet tells a King some stark truths about what is going to happen

Recalling two episodes while Elijah is in exile



Baal worship was rampant in Israel. The people couldn't decide who they were going to follow, and instead "hedged their bets". Baal is known among other things as a bringer of rain for harvest etc. but with it came many evil practices. God wanted to get through to his people. First he had to prepare them by sending three years of drought.

Elijah at Carmel



The highlight of Elijah's ministry; a truly momentous series of events

Elijah is commanded by God

And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

1 Kings 18:1

God has His people everywhere and often in unlikely and unexpected places and yet He can use all such and we must not be so blinkered not to realise. Elijah is about to meet one of them, who has an important part to play in this story even though he is usually given scant recognition.

Elijah and Obadiah

And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?

And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord,
Behold, Elijah is here.

And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?

1 Kings 18: 7-9

It is a strange quirk of human nature to want to blame anyone but oneself. This was certainly true of Ahab who saw Elijah as the instigator of the woes besetting his kingdom whereas all Elijah was doing was telling the king what God has told him, in the hope there may be a change of heart. One might ask: what is today's Baal worship?

Elijah and Ahab

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, **Art thou he that troubleth Israel?**

And he answered, **I have not troubled Israel; but thou**, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

1Kings 18: 17-19

Many important questions have been asked in the Bible e.g. what is truth? my God why hast thou forsaken me? what must I do to be saved? But the question Elijah asked is just as important and is one we need to ask of ourselves – it is all or nothing. We mustn't be lukewarm or serve two masters and we need to be resolutely on the Lord's side.

Elijah and the people

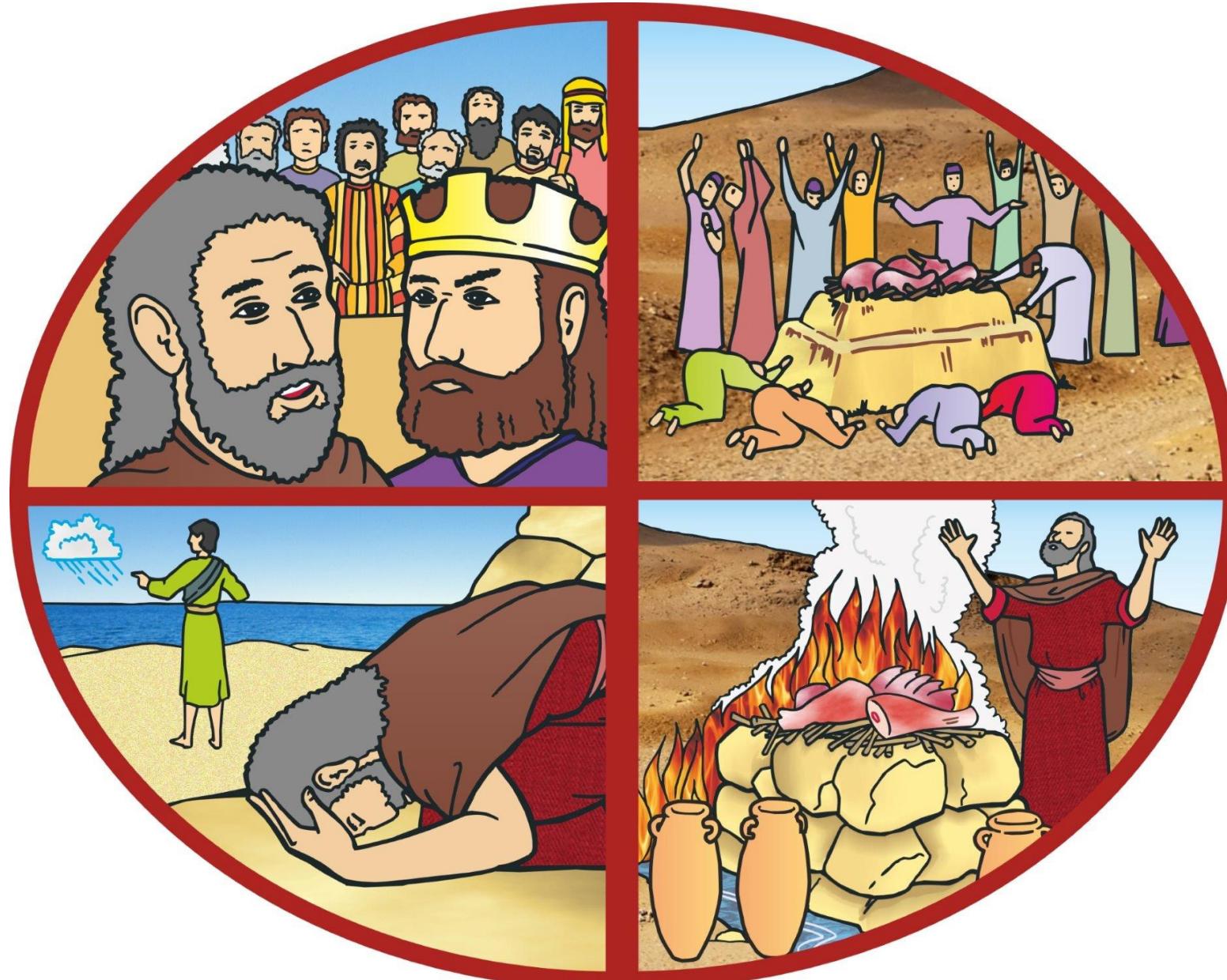
So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, **How long halt ye between two opinions?** if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. 1Kings 18: 20-22

“halt”, “waver”, “limp”, “falter”, “hesitate, “sit on the fence”, “not make up your mind”

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal



Let the contest begin

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” ²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” ³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

The God who answers by fire

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

Elijah and Ahab; and the rain falls

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

⁴³ “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’”

⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.



Introducing Jezebel



A truly evil woman who could and did wield great power,
arguably, the effective power behind the throne

Elijah flees from Jezebel

19 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

² Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

³ And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life...

One wonders what might have happened if Elijah had stayed: killed or revival? What would God have wanted? Does this mark the end of Elijah's ministry? As for the answer to those questions and what happens next – we will see next time!