

Elijah and the Contest with Baal

(1 Kings 18:1, 2, 17--46)

Introduction

[Teacher, place the following items in a bag: a picture of a television; a picture of a famous singer, actor, or sports hero; a sports item such as a baseball. Have the children try to guess the items by giving them some hints.] Some people think these things are more important than God; boys and girls often spend time on these things and then say they don't have time to read their Bibles; some children do these things rather than going to church or Sunday school. [Reveal the items in the bag.]

The first Commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). In today's lesson we will learn that the people of Israel forgot how important it is to keep God first in their lives.

Opening Prayer

Father, You are the only true God. You alone are worthy of our worship. Help us to beware of the "idols" we put into our lives. Teach us this morning how important it is for us to always put You first in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

...the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. (Deuteronomy 4:39)

Lesson

God's people were in serious trouble! King Ahab had led them to worship idols, wooden or stone statues of false gods. This made God angry with the people so He made the rain stop for three and a half years. The streams dried up. The plants died. Everyone was hungry and thirsty. Finally, God spoke to Elijah and told him to go to King Ahab with a message.

1 Kings 18:1

Later on, in the third year of the drought, the LORD said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!"

King Ahab blamed Elijah for the drought and the famine and had been looking for him for 3 ½ years; Ahab wanted to kill Elijah. So, Elijah probably wasn't very excited about God telling him to go see Ahab!

1 Kings 18:17

When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"

Elijah reminded him that God had brought this disaster on the land because Ahab had led the people into idol worship.

1 Kings 18:18

"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead."

Then Elijah challenged Ahab to a contest to see whose god was the most powerful. Have any of you entered a contest before?

1 Kings 18:19

Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel."

King Ahab called everyone together as Elijah had ordered. What a gathering that must have been. Thousands of men, women, and children crowded together on Mount Carmel. As the people gathered, Elijah sternly told them to decide between God and Baal.

1 Kings 18:20-21

So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. (21) Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.

The people of Israel had combined the worship of Baal with the worship of the true and living God. But God had clearly taught them that they were to worship Him and Him alone.

Some Christians today want to worship God, yet they continue to give other things first place in their lives. Often the things that take that special place in our hearts and lives are not sinful. They could be clothes, toys, sports, television – things that are not wrong, but they can become “idols” in our lives if we allow them to become more important to us than God is. Whatever you are spending most of your time on tells others what’s most important to you. It is important NOT to allow anything to take God’s place in your life.

King Ahab and the Israelites had sinned by trying to serve both the true and living God *and* Baal. Now Elijah told them they would have to choose. Elijah told them they need to make up their minds, *“How long will you try to serve both Baal and the Lord? If the Lord is God, follow Him! But if Baal is God then follow him!”*

1 Kings 18:22-24

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. (23) Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. (24) Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!” And all the people agreed.

The people shouted their agreement to this contest. The people thought that the prophets of Baal would surely win. After all, there were 450 of them. But Elijah had something that the prophets of Baal didn’t have. Elijah had God, and God wanted to show His power.

So they prepared to sacrifice a young bull on an altar.

1 Kings 18:26

So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, “O

Baal, answer us!” But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

They called upon their god. They pleaded with him to send fire. But there was no reply. Hour after hour they danced in circles under the hot sun.

About noon Elijah began to tease them.

1 Kings 18:27

About noontime Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”

Furiously the prophets of Baal continued their cries. They grew desperate and leaped about yelling, *“Send down fire!”* But no fire came.

Baal could not answer because he was a false god. Only God, the Creator, who lives in heaven can hear and answer prayer (Jeremiah 33:3). This living and true God loves you and wants you to call on Him to save you (Romans 10:13). If you call on the Lord Jesus to save you, He will give you eternal life. A false god or idol can never give eternal life. Baal was a false god who could not hear the prophets as they called out at their altar.

Then Elijah prepared his sacrifice.

1 Kings 18:30

Then Elijah called to the people, “Come over here!” They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down.

Then Elijah dug a trench about three feet wide around the altar. He piled wood upon the altar and laid the bull on the wood. He then filled four barrels with water and poured the water over the bull and the wood. He wanted to make sure that it was impossible for a man to light the fire.

1 Kings 18:35

and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

Then, Elijah prayed and asked God to show the people that He was the true God.

1 Kings 18:36-37

At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. (37) O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."

Elijah didn't have to shout and dance to make God hear him. He simply and quietly prayed, "Oh Lord, show us that You are God. Hear me and send fire so these people will know that You are God."

And suddenly there was a mighty flash of flame from heaven. With a huge roar, a great fire burned up the sacrifice, all the dripping wet wood, the altar and even the water in the trench. Nothing remained!

1 Kings 18:38

Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench!

The people were amazed. In a spectacular way God had proven that He, alone, is the true God.

God is the only one that is worthy of our worship. Yet it is easy to allow other things to become more important to us than He is. If you notice that you are spending more time with your friends or watching TV than you are with God, then, watch out! You've got an idol! If you make God first place in your life, He will bless you and meet your needs. God longed for the children of Israel to give Him all their worship. By sending fire from heaven, He showed them in a miraculous way that He is God.

1 Kings 18:39

And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"

Elijah told them to round up all the false prophets of Baal and he put them all to death! And shortly after that God brought the rains. The three and a half years of drought was over, now that the people turned their hearts back to God.

Although the prophets of Baal raged all afternoon, no one answered them. Their god was silent because it was not real. The gods we may be tempted to follow are not idols of wood or stone, but they are just as false and dangerous because they cause us to depend on something other than God. Beauty, popularity, riches, or having lots of material things can become our gods if we spend most of our time chasing after them. But when we reach times of trouble, if we called out to these so-called gods, there will only be silence. They can offer us no true answers to our problems, no direction in life, and no wisdom to know what to do.

God honored Elijah for honoring His name when no one else would. And, God blessed the people when they turned their love back to Him. God will bless us too when we love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and make him first in our lives.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for being our great and wonderful God. Help us to watch out for the idols that we are so prone to put into our lives. Help us to notice when we are spending more time talking with our friends than we do with You. Help us to notice when we spend more time watching TV than we do reading Your word. Show us when we make anything or anyone more important to us than You. Then help us to turn our heart back again to You, our one and only true God, the maker of heaven and earth. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

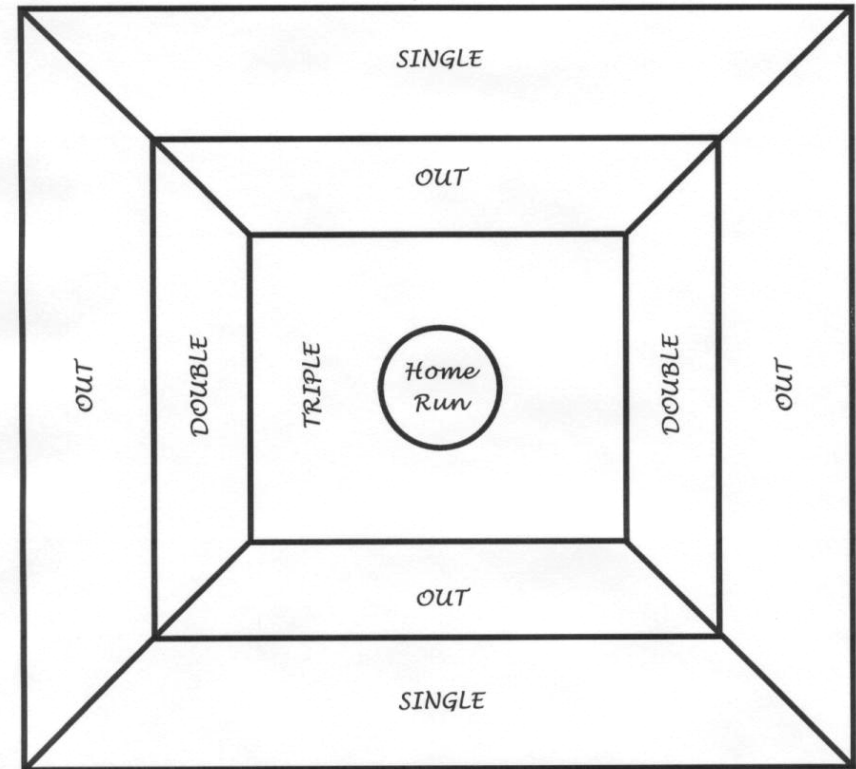
Bible Baseball

PREPARATION:

1. Draw and label a target on a large sheet of paper (see sketch). Make sure it is large enough for students to hit easily.
2. Mark a baseball diamond in the room: Home Plate, First Base, Second Base, and Third Base.

PROCEDURE:

1. Divide class into two teams.
2. First child "up" answers a Review Question and then throws a coin or a bean bag onto the target.
3. If the child gets an "out" he goes to the end of the line, otherwise the child moves around to the appropriate place: first base for a single, second base for a double, third base for a triple, all the way around and back to home plate for a home run.
4. If a student missed the target completely, he or she may have another chance to throw.
5. After a team has three outs, the other team is "up to bat."



Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

1. What is the name of the prophet that took messages to King Ahab? (Elijah)
2. Why did God stop the rain in the land of Israel for 3 ½ years? (King Ahab had led the people into idol worship.)
3. What contest did Elijah challenge Ahab to? (To see whose god was the most powerful.)
4. How is God different from Baal? (God has power and answers prayer; Baal does not. God is real; Baal is not.)

5. How did Elijah show that he believed in the one true God? (He obeyed God.)
6. How would the people know who the true God was? What did they ask their gods to send down from heaven to prove his power? (Fire.)
7. What did Elijah do to make sure that no human being could set his altar on fire? (He drenched it in water.)
8. What did the false prophets of Baal do to get their god to send fire down from heaven? (They shouted and danced, leaped and yelled.)
9. What did Elijah do to get God to send fire down from heaven? (He simply and quietly prayed.)
10. How did God answer Elijah's prayer? (He immediately sent fire that burned up the offering and altar and the water in the trench round the altar.)
11. Why didn't Baal send fire? (He was silent because it was not real.)
12. What did the people do when they saw the fire of God burn up Elijah's sacrifice? (They fell down with their faces to the ground and cried, "*The Lord is God! The Lord is God!*")
13. How did God show His power to Elijah and the people at Mt. Carmel? (He sent fire from Heaven and burned up Elijah's sacrifice.)
14. What are some idols that you and I are prone to make in our lives? (TV, toys, beauty, lots of friends or things...)
15. How can you tell if something is beginning to become an idol in our life? (We are spending more time with that "thing" than we are with God.)
16. What is the first Commandment? ("*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" Exodus 20:3)

Additional game questions

17. If you had to tell someone who God is, what would you say? How would you describe Him? (He's the creator of the universe; He's all powerful; nothing is too hard for him.)
18. What does our Memory verse tell us we should take to heart? (That the Lord is the only God in heaven and earth.)
19. What are some things you believe about God? (He is loving; He provides for us; He's all knowing...)
20. Why do you want others to know what you believe about God?
21. What are some things you can do to show what you believe about God? (Obey His commands. Tell others about God. Be kind to others.)
22. If you show people that you believe in God, what might happen as a result? (They might come to ask Jesus to be their Savior, too.)
23. Why is it important to show that we believe in God and what He has done for us? (He's done so much for us; He deserves it.)
24. When have you seen someone show that he or she believes in God? What happened?
25. How can you show that you believe in God at school? At home? With your friends? (Obey parents and teachers. Help and be kind to friends. Spend time taking to God and learning about Him.)
26. When are sometimes it is hard to let others know what you believe about God?
27. Why do you think people are sometimes afraid to show that they believe in God? What is hard about letting other people know what you believe in?
28. Our actions and attitudes can show we believe that the Lord is the only true God. How do people who believe in God act differently from people who do not believe in Him? Why?

