

## **Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 14, Part 3**

### **1 Kings 17-18, Part 3---Who is God?**

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Ahab had said when he met Elijah, you're the one causing trouble for Israel. And Elijah answered, no, no, you're the one causing trouble for Israel. So, he says, summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

Now, the location of this conflict is quite significant. Mount Carmel is on the end of this ridge. The central ridge runs up through the country from southwest to northeast.

And then there's a finger of it that goes off this way, and Mount Carmel is right on the point of that ridge looking out over the Mediterranean Sea. Do you have some idea why he chose this spot? Because the rain, if it comes, will come off the sea. And the lightning, if it falls, will fall from a storm coming in off the sea.

He is making this conflict as sharp as he can. Why does he demand that the prophets of Baal and Asherah be brought to this place? Again, he is going to make the conflict as sharp and clear as he can. He's not intending to win a cheap victory here.

He is staking everything, everything, on his trust in God. He is calling the enemy forth in its full panoply, in its full array. Notice that he says that the 400 prophets of Asherah are supported by the queen, Jezebel.

She has them, quote, eating at her table. That's not, I think, literal. I think the table would have had to be too big.

But the point is, she is feeding them. She is supplying them. She has tried to kill the prophets of Yahweh.

And as far as Elijah knows, he's it. But, you've heard the cliché, one plus the Lord is a majority. And that's what Elijah is banking on here.

Now, he says to them, how long will you, this is the New International Version, how long will you waver between two opinions? The Hebrew suggests the idea of limping. How long are you going to limp between two opinions? How long are you going to try to sit on the fence? Now, why does he do this? Why does he say to them, you have to choose? Why couldn't they worship Baal and Yahweh? Why can't we worship the Lord on Sunday and the world the rest of the week? Why can't we declare our trust in God on one day and demonstrate that we are trusting ourselves the rest of

the week? Paganism is the attempt to manipulate nature to supply our own needs. That's it.

Now, the ancient pagans felt that the best way to try to manipulate nature was to humanize it, to put faces on these forces. Because, well, we think we know how to manipulate humans. We have taken the faces off, but the principle is exactly the same.

We think we can manipulate the forces materialistically, or physically, or in some other way. But we are as deeply pagan as any people that has ever lived on the face of the earth. Now, why do we have to choose? Jesus said the same thing.

You cannot serve God and mammon. We think of mammon as money, but it's really much more than that. It's the physical world.

Why do we have to choose? Ah, ah, because Yahweh is not this world. Try to make Him part of this world, and you've reduced Him to one more idol, and you have made Him nothing. We have to choose between trusting the world and our ability to manipulate the world and trusting Yahweh.

Now, will He use our abilities? Will He use this world that He's given us to bless us? Of course, He will. But the question is, where is our loyalty? As we spoke, looking at chapter 15, what is a perfect heart? It is a heart that is absolutely devoted to Yahweh. No ifs, no ands, no buts.

No rivals, no limits. That's what God is looking for. He's looking for you and me to have a perfect heart.

And that's what Elijah is facing these people with. You cannot have both. You either have the God who is not this world, who cannot be manipulated, who loves you, who wants to care for you, who wants to bless you, or you must choose, I'll do it myself.

Will you? Will I? Will we surrender our attempts to satisfy our desires by ourselves? That's what Elijah is calling for. So, he says, okay, here it is. We're each going to put a bull cut apart on an altar.

And you pray, and I'll pray. And whichever God answers by fire, lightning. He knows who Baal is.

He knows how Baal is represented. Whichever God answers with a lightning bolt, that's God. So, he has taken the battle right into Baal's court.

Do you think Baal is the God of the storm? No, no, no, Yahweh is. And let's see whether that's true or not. Let's see whether I'm right or wrong.

And so, we see the picture of the prophets of Baal. Baal, answer us, they shouted. But there was no response.

No one answered. They danced around the altar they had made. They're doing rituals.

Now, in the fall, the vegetation God died. And it's a real question. Is he going to come back in the spring? He's gone down into the underworld, which is one version.

Is the underworld going to keep him so chained back that he can't get out again? If he doesn't come back in the spring, we're all going to die. What do you do? You give him the best funeral you can give him. You let him know how grieved you are.

How sad you are that this terrible thing has happened to him. So, he's going to say, wow, wow, aren't those people nice? Don't they love me? I think I'll come back in the spring. How do you really show how sad you are? You cut yourself.

That's what they were doing. They were doing a funeral ritual for Baal. To try to get him not to come back in the spring but to come back right now.

And Elijah, oh my. He just mocks them. Oh, well, shout a little louder.

You have reduced God to this world. So, he's a God, isn't he? Maybe he's deep in thought, like a human. Maybe he's busy.

Now, almost certainly, he goes beyond the limits here. The Hebrew says, perhaps he is moving himself. English versions will say something like, maybe he's on a journey.

But it's almost certain that he's saying maybe he's in the bathroom. You've made him like yourself. You've reduced him to a human.

Well, he's really human then, isn't he? Just like you, he's going to the toilet. So, they shouted louder and slashed themselves. They continued their frantic prophesying.

So, again, they're babbling. They're screaming. There was no response.

No one answered. No one paid attention. That's verse 29.

You think the author is trying to make a point, isn't he? No response. No one answered. No one paid attention.

And what did Elijah do? Well, first of all, he makes the thing worse. There's a big spring at the foot of Mount Carmel. And apparently, this had not dried up.

And so, he has people go up and down the mountain three times to drench the altar. Drench the sacrifice—and now, notice.

I just want to drive this point home. Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. The one who's proven himself faithful across the generations.

Let it be known today that you are God in Israel. So, these people will know that I'm your servant. I've done what you've commanded.

You've spoken. Answer me, Lord. Answer me so that these people will know that you, Lord, are God.

And that you are turning their hearts back again. I don't just want them to recognize who's in charge here. I want you to turn them back to you.

No rituals. No magic. Prayer.

Straightforward. Clear. Based on what God has done in the past.

With a goal that he may be known for. And that people's hearts may turn back to him. Bam! The lightning fell.

Burned up the sacrifice, the altar. Dried up the water all around it. And the people were smart enough to get the right answer.

Yahweh, he is God. Yahweh, he is God. No ifs, no ands, no buts.

The very thing that was thought to be the quality of Baal. That almighty power. And in this case, it seems to have come from a clear sky.

Yahweh. Yahweh is God. And the same people who would have torn Elijah limb from limb.

If Baal had answered, now turn and at Elijah's command.

Tear up the prophets of Baal. Now it's interesting. Commentators wonder, what about the prophets of Asherah? Did they run? Or did they not show up? We don't know for sure.

That is an interesting question. And then Elijah says. Okay, Ahab.

You better go eat lunch. Because it's going to rain, it's going to rain.

And he sends a boy up to the very peak of the mountain. And says, see any clouds out there? No. He bent down to the ground.

Put his face between his knees. Anything? No. Go back.

No rituals. No frantic babbling. No. Go back. No. Go back. No. Once more. Well, there's a little cloud out there. About as big as a man's hand. Ahab. Get in your chariot.

Head back across to Jezreel because I tell you what. It's going to rain.

When I was a child in Sunday school, we had. Poster size pictures.

That was put on a bulletin board. And if you were judged to be the best-behaved student in the class.

For a month. You got to choose your picture. I knew the picture I wanted.

It's a picture of a chariot. Pulled by three white horses. That is just frantic. Galloping full speed. In the chariot is a king. He's got on a crown, and he's whipping those horses.

And behind him are billowing black clouds. And in front of them is this old man.

With his beard whipping back over his shoulder. He's got his. Robe pulled up around his knees.

And he's just bugging down the road. He ran before Ahab to Jezreel.

Now. I think it's possible. It's a direct shot from Mount Carmel to Jezreel. It would be through the edge of the Jezreel Valley here and that valley in a rainstorm gets very swampy. So, I think it's possible.

That Ahab went around this way. And that Elijah cut the corner. But the point is to the very end of the day. God. Is able to use His servants for his glory.

The rain fell. Who is God? Yahweh. So, the opening battle has been won. Won in a climactic kind of way.

But the question will be: What happens next? What happens next in this war? Is one battle enough? Or is it going to take more to defeat the entrenched foes of Yahweh. -the entrenched enemy. That is around him.

What shall we draw from these chapters? Well.

God is God. There is no other God.

He is a God who wants to be known and who speaks.

Not audibly, but yet clearly. He has spoken in his word.

He has spoken in his son. He speaks in our hearts. He wants to be known.

And to know him is to trust him.

To trust him is to surrender to him.

And to surrender to him is to be at his disposal for good, for us, and for the world.

God bless you.