



# GREAT MIRACLES

OLD TESTAMENT

1 KINGS 18

LIVING WAY  
BIBLE STUDY

PERSONAL APPLICATION

A FIERY FAREWELL – 2 KINGS 2

59

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*“The people of Israel had repented and once again  
committed themselves to be God’s people.”*  
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## WHOSE GOD RULES?

Wouldn't we all be gratified to witness visible proof of our Lord's supreme and uncontested dominion over creation? The Word of God proclaims that our Lord created all which is good, and explains how He has conquered all that is evil. Nevertheless, we would delight in a visible demonstration of His power and might, something dramatic and colorful which would stop the mouths of unbelievers and affirm once and for all His supremacy. For example, it would thrill this writer to see the heavens open up over Mecca and a thunderous voice proclaim, "Islam is a false religion! Repent and turn to the Triune God!"

Of course, I seriously doubt my fantasy will ever be realized, unless the Lord has some rather extravagant plans for the conversion of the earth which He has not yet revealed. The fact of the matter is, there was a time when our God did reveal His power and supremacy over another god, and He did so in a manner which would inspire the faithful through the centuries. This lesson's miracle involves a moment in history when the God of Israel visibly demonstrated His authority over the gods of the Phoenicians. The contest arose on Mt. Carmel and it determined whose god ruled: Baal of the Phoenicians, or Yahweh, the God of Israel.

First, some background about the prophet Elijah. Elijah first appears around 864 BC, halfway through the reign of Ahab who ruled the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab's father had developed an alliance with the kingdom of Phoenicia, and the association had been cemented by the marriage of his son with the daughter of a Phoenician king. Her name was Jezebel. To be sure, Ahab's father had already been introducing a number of foreign gods into Israel's worship, but once Jezebel ascended her throne, the floodgates were opened. In fact, the Bible does not hesitate to call Ahab the most wicked king ever to rule in Israel.



Under Jezebel's influence, shrines were built to the Phoenician god, Baal, and to the fertility goddess, Astarte (also known as Asherah or Ashtaroth). But, the worship of false gods didn't stop with mere shrines. Jezebel installed 450 priests of Baal and 400 priests of Astarte as part of her household! Of course, with the priests of these false gods enjoying such a degree of respect in the king's house, we can only imagine the sort of disrepute into which the true priests of Israel fell. The priests of God were suppressed or exiled — or killed. King Ahab allowed his own beliefs to erode because he believed there was little harm in combining the worship of the God of Israel with the cult of Baal. We find the same syncretism in contemporary American Christianity where the influences of Eastern mysticism and New Age philosophy water down the true and lasting doctrines of our faith. An example is, when alleged "Christians" define angels as nothing more than New Age channelers to the souls of the departed.

With Israel once again drifting into apostasy, it would only be a matter of time before God's people would find themselves in dire circumstances. This time, the consequence of their faithlessness would be a long and destructive drought. The prophet Elijah, (which means "the Lord is my God") declared to King Ahab that the people would suffer many years without rain or dew. Now, this isn't just some arbitrary plague with which the Lord would punish His people. Baal and Astarte were the Phoenician's fertility gods. More specifically, Baal was thought to be the lord of the rain clouds. What an irony that some wild prophet from the desert should announce Baal's impotence at fulfilling his divine role! Nevertheless, that was Elijah's prophecy, and after declaring his warnings to Ahab, Elijah retreated to the desert to be nourished and cared for by the Lord.

After three years of drought, the Lord told Elijah to seek out King Ahab. By this time the drought had brought ruin to the nation and its people. During his reign, King Ahab had installed a man named Obadiah to be in charge of the palace. The office which Obadiah filled is first mentioned under King Solomon when an individual named Ahishar was given the responsibility to administer over the palace and care for the king's properties (I Kings 4:6). It's an office which is mentioned fairly frequently in the books of the Kings. Despite Ahab's apostasy, Obadiah had remained a faithful follower of Israel's God. As a matter of fact, even as he served the apostate king, Obadiah protected 100 of the Lord's prophets in nearby caves, providing them food and water. Obadiah is one of those little mentioned heroes in the Bible who risked his life to serve his God.

Even after three years of drought, King Ahab had not been moved in the least to repent. Rather, he sent Obadiah scouring the land for food and water with which

he could keep his chariot horses alive and thereby maintain his military strength. While Obadiah was searching for the last remnants of grass, he stumbled across Elijah — and recognized the prophet. Obadiah was stunned, of course, because King Ahab had been searching not only the land of Israel, but also foreign lands in order to find and execute Elijah even as the king had executed so many of the Lord's prophets. His wife, Jezebel, probably hoped that by sacrificing the prophets she could appease Baal and end the ferocious drought. After Obadiah fell to his knees out of respect for the prophet, he was commanded to tell King Ahab about Elijah's presence.

Now Obadiah may have been a hero, but he was certainly no fool. He feared that should he give this message to the king, Ahab would search for Elijah, and the Spirit of the Lord, still protecting the prophet from harm, would carry the prophet away thereby making Obadiah look like a fool and a liar. And Ahab, of course, would punish his insolent servant with death. So, Obadiah begged Elijah to retract his command. He reminded Elijah of his heroic quest to save the hundred prophets, to which Elijah consoles Obadiah by promising to appear before the king that very day.

When Ahab learned of Elijah's presence, the king went out to meet him. And when they met, the exchange was hardly pleasant. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" At first glance, the king's greeting may not seem so harsh to us, but understanding the implications of Ahab's accusation helps us understand the threatening situation in which Elijah now found himself. The same term, "troublemaker," was used by Joshua when he confronted one of the Israelites who had disobeyed the Lord and hoarded some of Jericho's plunder. As a result, all of Israel

stoned the sinner to death (Joshua 7). With that background we realize that when Ahab called Elijah a troubler of Israel, it was a veritable death sentence.

There are two other times during Elijah's tenure when he is called a troublemaker. But, of course, God's prophets are always disturbers of worldly peace. If an alleged prophet of God does nothing but make people feel comfortable and content, he is no doubt a false prophet. Remember, God's Word is a two-edged sword, and although the promises of God's forgiveness and grace through Jesus Christ are indeed comforting and consoling, the other edge of the sword reminds us that to find consolation in God's promises, one must recognize and repent of personal sin — which is not always a comfortable thing to do! Those who come to church merely to have their ears tickled will not be pleased by a true prophet, because the Word of the Lord must disturb in order to comfort.

When Elijah responded to the king by calling him the true troublemaker because he had allowed the worship of Baal in Israel, the gauntlet had been thrown down. Elijah challenged Ahab to amass his prophets at Mt. Carmel, which stood as a ridge next to the Mediterranean Sea, and would suffer the least from any kind of drought. The moist air coming off the water would tend to condense at its higher altitude. It would seem Baal could be more effective in nurturing the land and providing rain at this site than at any other. Elijah would duel the prophets of Baal on their own turf.

Elijah begins his duel by challenging the people of Israel with this question: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

The people give no response because they are no longer convinced of God's authority and power. How very sad.

And so, Elijah and the prophets of Baal confront each other. The prophets of Baal are to prepare a bull and put it on a pile of wood. Elijah is to do the same. Both sides are to call on their respective deities, and the god who consumes the altar in fire will be considered genuine. The prophets of Baal are not lax in attempting to arouse their god into action. If by sheer energy and persistence the prophets of Baal could have consumed the sacrifice, they would have won the duel without question. They called on Baal all morning and all afternoon, but nothing happened. Elijah jeered at them, encouraging them to increase the volume of their pleas because Baal might be sleeping. The prophets of Baal shouted louder and cut themselves with swords and spears. And still there was silence.

When the prophets of Baal had exhausted themselves in futile shouting and acts of self-mutilation, Elijah called the people of Israel to him. On Mt. Carmel lay the ruins of an altar to the Lord, perhaps destroyed by the agents of Jezebel. In front of the people, Elijah repaired the altar by taking 12 stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and placing them side by side so that they could hold the elements of the sacrifice. Then he dug a trench around the altar. Taking wood and the sacrificial bull, he placed them all on the altar and called on the people to pour water over it all. Four large jars of water were poured over the altar and its elements and the dousing continued three times until the trench around the altar was filled with water. By saturating the altar with water, Elijah was proving the authenticity of the miracle to come. There were no tricks, no acts of deception. This would be the real thing.

With a quiet but meaningful prayer, Elijah called on the Lord to demonstrate His power and authority, and to affirm the legitimate call Elijah possessed as the Lord's prophet. Without a moment's hesitation, fire fell from the sky burning up the sacrifice and evaporating the water in the trench. There could not have been a more convincing demonstration of God's authority than this. The people of Israel fell on their faces and cried, "The Lord, he is God!" Israel's apostasy was coming to an end — at least for the time being. Elijah had proved the Phoenician gods impotent.

Someone has said that we can never discover the power of prayer until our prayers look up to God like wounded animals with great round eyes of pain. Surely, Elijah's prayer

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reflected that pain. He had witnessed his fellow prophets persecuted and put to death. He had lived in hiding for years as the Lord sheltered and nourished him. He had watched his people turn slowly but surely from the God of Israel to the gods of the Phoenicians, and his heart had slowly broken at the sight. But, by the power of God, and in God's good time, Elijah's prayers had been rewarded when all Israel returned repentantly to the Lord.

Elijah's victory is an inspiration to all Christians who feel their witness unappreciated and unrewarded. A time will come, and come suddenly, when the faith and trust of God's people will be vindicated. The faithful remain supported by divine truth, and no matter what skepticism and unbelief may greet our message, the Lord continues to reign supreme. It's important for Christians, who face the same trials and tribulations as anyone else, to remember the miracle on Mt. Carmel. We remember that although the Lord appeared distant and uninvolved for so many years, He acted when the time was right. He acted decisively and indisputably to support the mission and ministry of His servant Elijah.

And notice what occurred after Israel repented of its apostasy and returned to the Lord. Elijah told King Ahab to celebrate because the end of the drought was at hand. Elijah climbed to the top of Mt. Carmel and put his face between his knees. He prayed that the curse would be lifted. Seven times he told his servant to go and look at the Mediterranean Sea, and on the seventh time Elijah's servant reported he had seen a cloud on the horizon as small as a man's hand rising from the sea. As the minutes passed, the sky became overcast and dark. A wind arose, and when the wind had passed, a great rain began falling. The drought had come to an end. The people of Israel had repented and once again committed themselves to be God's people.

And the rain came down in torrents.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION***A FIERY FAREWELL – 2 KINGS 2*

*Lord God, I ask Your rich blessings on my study this day. I pray Your Spirit would direct my thoughts to the miraculous means by which You brought Elijah to his heavenly home. May I consider my own end on this earth, and use the time You have given me wisely and to Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Read 1 Kings 19:19–21

1. What was Elisha doing when Elijah first greeted him? (1 Kings 19:19)

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Give names and occupations of others our Lord chose for His messengers and prophets.

2. Describe the way in which Elijah demonstrated that Elisha would be his successor (1 Kings 19:19–21).

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What was Elisha's reaction?

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How do we know Elisha would never again return to farming as an occupation?

3. In a broad sense, how does Paul describe the spiritual gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:1–5?

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In what ways could the characteristics of prophecy be applied to a pastor's ministry of preaching and teaching?

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After considering the method by which Elijah demonstrated Elisha's "call" into the prophetic ministry, what significance might you attach to the tradition that individuals do not wear a "stole" until they are ordained into the holy ministry?

Read 2 Kings 2:1–18

4. In what fashion was Elijah to be taken to heaven according to 2 Kings 2:1?

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From where does the Lord answer Job's pleas in Job 38:1?

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How does the Lord introduce His throne room to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:4?

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How does the Spirit of God announce His arrival at Pentecost? (Acts 2:2–3)

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How are the chariot and horses described in the abduction of Elijah? (2 Kings 2:11)

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5. What is Elisha's consistent response when Elijah commands him to remain behind three different times? (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6)

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Other loyalties in Scripture which seem equally unbreakable:  
Ruth 1:16–18

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1 Samuel 18:1–4

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John 11:5

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Romans 16:3–4

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2 Timothy 1:16–18

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How has someone in your life been this kind of friend?

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6. What did Elijah do when confronted with the seemingly impassable Jordan River? (2 Kings 2:8)

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Of what other prophets does this act remind you? (Exodus 14:21–22; Joshua 3:7–17)

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7. What was Elisha's last request of Elijah? (2 Kings 2:9)

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What do you think Elisha was asking for?

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Why could Elijah not give an unqualified answer to Elisha's request? (2 Kings 2:10; Psalm 40:8; Matthew 6:10)

8. After Elijah had been taken from him, why did Elisha tear apart his clothes? (Genesis 37:29; Joshua 7:3–6; Job 1:20; Matthew 26:65)

9. How does Elisha show he has been granted his request to be Elijah's successor? (2 Kings 2:13–15)

How did Joshua show himself to be Moses' successor? (Joshua 4:1–14)

10. What did the prophets from Jericho believe happened to Elijah?

How long did they search for him? (2 Kings 2:17)

11. Even though Elisha was Elijah's successor, how did Elisha's death differ from Elijah's? (2 Kings 13:20)

12. When did the Jews believe Elijah would return again, and what would he do? (Malachi 3:1, 4:5–6)

Who fulfilled these prophecies? (Matthew 17:10–13; Luke 1:17)

But did Elijah ever return again? When? (Matthew 17:1–9)