

## “Baal Me Out!”

### *Who's the Boss? – A series on the Kings*

#### *1 Kings 18*

**Introduction:** Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Kings 18, 1 Kings 18.

The tensions are high in Israel at the end of 1 Kings 17 and the beginning of 1 Kings 18. There has been a drought in the land that has lasted for 3 ½ years. And by a drought, I don't simply mean a shortage of rain, but the text tells us that there has been a complete absence of rain. Absolutely no rain for over three years. This means that water is a priceless treasure and grain is a coveted possession. This means that people are dying every day from hunger and thirst. This means that even the king is out looking for that last patch of grass for his livestock. Every person in the nation of Israel has felt the horrific effect of this life-zapping drought. And it was all because of the words of Elijah – Yahweh God's prophet. Chapter 17 starts with these words – “Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.’” These words proved true over the next three years of Israel's life. No rain and no prophet. God sent his man, Elijah to a brook in Cherith to be fed by ravens and eventually to a home in Zarephath to be fed by a widow and to raise her son from the dead. Even in the midst of horrific drought that was meant to bring God's judgment upon a people who had abandoned the one true God, this one true God was at work to provide and thereby display his power.

And now at the beginning of chapter 18 we see that the judgment from God is going to end. The word of the Lord comes to Elijah in the third year of this absolutely rainless drought and tells him to go to Ahab because God is going to send rain upon the earth. **Read verse 1.** Chapter 18 unfolds for us the events that take place as Elijah goes to present himself to Ahab. By the end of the chapter it is raining in the land and all of Israel knows for sure who the real God is. And along the way we learn some life-shaping lessons by looking at some of the main characters of this narrative. In verses 2-16 we are confronted with a man named Obadiah. Let's call him Obadiah the Fearful, and his story begins in verse 2.

#### **I. Obadiah the Fearful – 18:2-16**

- a. Obadiah was over the house of Ahab, which points us to understand that this was no small position. He was a significant servant and had earned significant trust from his Baal-worshipping boss. The drought was so severe that the king and his trusted right-hand man Obadiah are out looking for that last patch of grass for the livestock so that they won't die. You would think that Ahab would be more concerned about his own people more than he is about his livestock, but when you bow down to a false god people become expendable and object of power and provision like horses and mules rise to utmost importance. But Obadiah dutifully obeys his master and while he is out on this escapade he providentially bumps into God's prophet on his way back into the land. Now this surprise meeting is not the simple bumping into someone from church at Wal-Mart. No, this is more like a presidential cabinet member happening upon Usama Bin Laden. Ahab had sent search parties to every surrounding nation and had made them pledge that they had not seen hide nor tail of Elijah. The country was on high alert to find the prophet of God. He was Israel's most wanted man, and here is Obadiah just happening upon him while he is out on an errand for that last blade of grass. Public Enemy number one had been happened upon by Ahab's faithful servant Obadiah.

- b. But Obadiah was not just a faithful servant, he was a fearful servant. In verses 3 and 4 we are told by the narrator that Obadiah greatly feared the Lord and this great fear of the Lord propelled him to risk his own life to save the lives of 100 prophets of Yahweh. Jezebel had been on a tirade against the prophets of Yahweh, and one within her own household was secretly hiding 100 of them in a cave. Don't get me wrong – Obadiah had a healthy fear of Ahab and Jezebel too. In fact, he basically swears Elijah to fidelity to his word to appear to Ahab that very day because he knows that if he goes back and tells Ahab that Elijah is here and then Elijah is not here, Obadiah will be added to the count of dead God-fearers. But Obadiah's fear of the Lord far outweighed his fear of man, and so he became an instrument of God's gracious hand of protection and provision for 100 of God's men.
- c. Wickedness had not prevailed
- i. Obadiah the fearful and how God used him provides us with some important lessons. We can see that in this land filled with wicked idolatry and vile false worship, and blatant disregard for God, God was still present and at work. Wickedness had not prevailed over God's people. It had infiltrated the ranks and overtaken the throne, but it hadn't completely conquered. There were still Obadiah's and God had still kept at least 100 of his prophets alive in the face of Jezebel's wicked violence. God had provided for his prophets and God had given himself a witness in the King's own house. Isn't this vintage Yahweh? Like Joseph, Moses, and Daniel, God is often at work in the midst of a wicked and pagan regime to bring about the purposes that he has foreordained for His people. There were saints in Nero's palace, and there was a God-fearer who served as Ahab's right hand man. You see, true godliness, "as has been quaintly said, 'is a hardy plant, that can live amidst the frosts of persecution and the relaxing warmth of a corrupt court, and not merely in the conservatory of a pious family.'" (C. Knaap, *Kings of Israel*, pg. 64)
  - ii. This will become very important in chapter 19 when Ahab is scared of Jezebel and on the run thinking that he is the only one left in the land who truly fears the Lord. He has been graciously reminded in this chance meeting with Obadiah that God had kept a remnant faithful to him and safe by his provision.
  - iii. This is also important to us because we must learn and remember that God's faithful provision often comes in different forms. For Elijah, God's faithful provision was through ravens and widow, but for the 100 prophets it was through a man in the king's own court. One was miraculous and almost unbelievable, and the other is actually pretty ordinary, but no less praiseworthy. Often God will provide for us through ordinary means like an Obadiah, instead of through miraculous means like a raven or an unending jar and jug of a widow. This is to say that both of these are praiseworthy, and both of these should provoke worship in our heart of the one true God. Our family has known this rather ordinary provision of God over the last two years. As we have waited to sell our house and have experienced the financial strain that this produced we have seen provide over and over and over again in very ordinary ways for all of our needs. This is none the less praiseworthy than if he had chosen to meet our needs through bird flying into our home with thousands of dollars strapped onto its back. God's provision is worthy of our praise and should provoke our worship no matter how it comes. Whether it is in the beak of a raven or in the hands of an Obadiah – it is from the Lord!
- d. Fearful faithfulness has many varieties

- i. We can also learn from Obadiah that fearful faithfulness has many varieties. For Elijah, his fear of God required him to obey the Word of God to confront Ahab and pronounce judgment upon him and his kingdom. For Obadiah, his fear of God provoked him to work behind the scenes to hide 100 prophets and use his position in the kingdom to bring them water and bread. Some commentators have been very harsh on Obadiah by saying that if he truly feared the Lord then he would have spoken up and confronted Ahab instead of being able to serve as his right hand man. But that is not what the text says. The text says that Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. Therefore, the difference between Obadiah and Elijah points us to the truth that faithfulness to the Lord has many shades and varieties. I do not mean to say that faithfulness to the Lord is some nebulous reality that we cannot pin down so that whoever says they are faithful must be faithful because faithfulness has many varieties. I am simply saying that you could easily look at the minutia of facts that we have about Obadiah and really question whether or not he could have truly feared the Lord and served under such a godless king. And yet, the text makes it clear that he feared the Lord greatly – even stating it two different times. There are clear boundaries to faithfulness, but within those boundaries there are many shades of variety. Had Obadiah bowed down to Baal and prayed to him for rain then Obadiah would not have been faithful. But he didn't necessarily have to confront Ahab every time he saw him. But Elijah couldn't have been faithful without confronting Ahab because he had been directly ordered to by the word of the Lord.
- ii. I bring this up to caution you against making yourself the judge of another Christian's faithfulness because within clear boundaries faithfulness has many varieties. This I think is summarized well by Paul's words when talking about doubtful things in Romans 14.
- iii. He says:
  1. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom. 14:4 ESV)
- iv. Let God be the judge of your brother's and sister's faithfulness. Learn from Obadiah that faithfulness has many varieties. Obadiah the Fearful quickly gives way in the text to Ahab the Troubler.

## II. Ahab the Troubler – 18:17-19

- a. In verses 17-19 we read of the confrontation between Elijah and Ahab. *Read verses 17-19.* After 3 years of absolutely no rain and absolutely no sign of God's prophet who had called for the hiatus you couldn't expect a friendlier greeting could you? Ahab is mad at Elijah. Ahab is frustrated with Elijah. Ahab is positive that all of this dry dirt, lack of vegetation, and dead bodies is Elijah's fault, and so he addresses him as the "troubler of Israel." But Elijah, being the prophet that he is cannot sit back and let the truth go undetected and so he corrects Ahab. Elijah has not been Israel's trouble, but rather their own king has been their trouble. This trouble started with Ahab's father Omri and dated back to their predecessor Jeroboam who led the way in abandoning the word of the Lord and following false gods. Ahab in particular had taken this to a new pinnacle as he created worship of Baal as the country's official religion. Elijah was not the problem – Ahab was.
- b. And so in verse 19 Elijah tells Ahab that he has a plan in mind to prove who has been the true troubler of Israel. He tells him to gather his 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, who is the goddess counterpart to Baal, and gather all of Israel and meet him on Mt. Carmel. The

divine duel that was started in chapter 17 will come to a head in chapter 18. The next several verses that describe the showdown between Baal and Yahweh are forged in the context of verses 17-19. Ahab thinks that Elijah is the trouble, and Elijah is sure that Ahab is the trouble. So, who is right? Well, gather your people and your prophets and let's find out. And so they do. They gather on Mt. Carmel to see who the real troubler is. Well, you know the rest of the story, and you know that Ahab, not Elijah, is the problem. He is the problem because by his leadership the people of Israel have abandoned the one true God and have entertained the worship of another.

### III. Israel the Doubtful – 18:20-21

- a. This reality is poignantly confronted by Elijah in verses 20-21. The assembly is gathered and the prophets are there, and here comes Elijah. You can sense the tension of the moment. He comes the man by whose mouth the rain has stopped for over three years. I don't think there were many warm fuzzy feelings in the hearts of the gathered crowd on Carmel as they saw Elijah approach. Most certainly they would have rushed him and killed him on the spot if it weren't for the restraining providence of God. And the tension only increases when Elijah opens his mouth and says this:
  - i. How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.
  - ii. These endearing words drew the line in the sand for the Israelites. It was obvious to Elijah what the problem was in the land. They didn't have rain because they didn't have singular faith and pure worship. They were Jehovah's people, called by his name, and they had been found whoring after another god. Elijah is pointing them to the absurdity of pluralistic worship. The God of Heaven is not a god who can be one among many. By his very nature and existence and works he has proven to be the only god. If he is mixed in with other gods, then the very foundation of His character is chipped away and he is no longer the God He claims to be. Pluralistic worship that includes Yahweh God is a worship that is absurd. And so Elijah says to the people, stop limping along. You are helpless and hurting because you are doubtful. If Yahweh is God, follow him, but if Baal is God then follow him. There can't be two, so pick which one you are serving. On a side note, Atheists are pretty smart people in this category. They understand the implications of admitting that there is a God at all, and so they choose to believe that there is no God at all. Pluralistic idolaters are not very smart because at the very heart of being God is that you alone are God. And so Elijah says to them – Choose this day whom you will serve.
- b. And then something unbelievable happens. There is silence among them. Nothing. Not a word. This could have been one of those fantastic moments in Israel's history where they corporately declared fidelity to God – like they did before Joshua after the conquest of the land, or before Moses at the end of his life. But instead, there is a deafening silence, and this deafening silence owes tribute to Ahab's leadership. These people had been so handicapped by Ahab's leadership into false worship that even after more than three years of God's severe judgment at the command of God's prophet, they still couldn't declare that Baal was not God and that Yahweh was. Israel was truly a doubtful people.
- c. What we learn from this is what we see throughout the Scriptures and hear from the lips of our Savior. No man can serve two masters. Either he will love the one and hate the other or hate the one and love the other. No man can serve God and money. Choose today if you will follow me. Count the cost, pick up your cross and follow after me. Yahweh God, and Jesus of Nazareth are one, and being one they cannot be mixed with others. It does matter who you believe in, and it

does matter what truths you stake your life upon. If Yahweh is God, serve Him. If there is another God, who is actually God, serve Him. But don't waver. Don't be so absurd as to waffle between this god and that. Choose today whom you will serve.

#### IV. Baal the Silent – 18:22-29

- a. These poignant words by Elijah are followed by the divine duel that will settle this whole thing. And so in verse 22 we read this.
- b. Elijah conceded every possible advantage to the prophets of Baal. This was a sure win for Baal.
- c. Home-Court
  - i. They were in fact on Baal's home court, Mt. Carmel. This was a mountain that had come to be identified with Baal and could even be thought of as Baal's bluff. These prophets were on familiar ground on Mt. Carmel. They had home-court advantage.
- d. First Choice
  - i. They also had the first choice of their bull. They could choose whichever one they thought to be the most likely to be accepted by Baal.
- e. First Chance
  - i. And Elijah gave them the first chance. They got to try it first, which was really significant because if Baal would answer them and rain down fire upon their sacrifice then the contest would be over – Baal would be the champion.
- f. Overwhelming Odds
  - i. They also had overwhelming odds in that they had 450 prophets calling out to Baal to answer them. Elijah simply had himself. So it was 450-1. Those are pretty good odds to have on your side.
- g. All Day
  - i. And Elijah gave them all day. From morning, all the way through to the evening – they tried and tried.
- h. Rabid Religious Practice
  - i. At noon, after it was obvious that after a few hours of effort, there needed to be more effort to get Baal's attention, Elijah began to righteously mock the false prophets. I say righteously mock because this is a case of holy sarcasm. The people of Israel who are watching this display of false worship may be starting to understand that Baal is really not a god at all. And so, Elijah uses some of the common explanations in pagan worship for why a god is not answering a request. He must be thinking deeply, or using the little god's room, or maybe he is on a trip, or he might even be asleep. And so, Elijah encourages them to shout louder to get his attention. Elijah was not mocking them with claims that would have been absurd to these prophets, and this is proven by the fact that they listen to him and do what he says. They increase the frenzy of their worship practices and they shout louder, and cut themselves and raved on all afternoon. What a sight this must have been! 450 men rabidly trying to get the attention of a god who is not there. And this was Elijah's point in his mockery. Maybe someone in the crowd would begin to see how absolutely absurd it is to think that Baal is the God who is the one true God. Would the one true God really need to be awakened, or need to be called out of the bathroom stall, or be called home from a long journey? Is this really who God is?
  - ii. And the overwhelming and glorious answer from the text is "No!" This is not who God is. He is not Baal and he is not like Baal because Baal is not God. Two times in the text we are told that their frantic pleas for Baal to listen to them and answer them were met with

absolute silence. In the middle of verse 26 it says “But there was no voice, and no one answered.” And then after a whole day of frenzied petition and an afternoon of cutting and personal injury to show their desperation the text says again in verses 29 – “but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.”

- iii. These are drastic and arresting words. These are depressing words for the Baal worshiper. With all of the odds stacked in his favor and with this frenzied petition before him, Baal was absolutely silent. If Baal existed, certainly he would have answered on this occasion. But he didn’t because he couldn’t because he doesn’t exist. And this deafening silence proves the point.

#### V. Yahweh the True – 18:30-46

- a. The true God will not be silent in this situation, and Elijah is about to make that point loud and clear to the Israelites. *Read verses 30-35.*
- b. Elijah calls the captivated crowd a little closer to him and repairs the altar of the Lord that had obviously been torn down by Jezebel’s wicked reforms. In his reparation of the altar he makes the point to take 12 stones, and not just 10 because Yahweh God is the God of Israel and Judah, not just the ten northern tribes. He then made a trench around the altar that was so large that it would contain two seahs of flour, or 7.3 liters. So, in actuality this isn’t a very big trench if it only can hold 3 ½ two liter bottles of water. But what is more likely is the narrator is saying that the trench itself was deep enough to hold the container that was used to carry the two seahs of grain. If this is the case, this is a significant trench. This is verified by what he does after he has the bull properly cut up and placed on the altar. He tells them to take four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and the wood. He repeated this 3 times so that there was a total of 12 jars of water poured out on top of the burnt offering. And then the text tells us that everything was completely drenched and the trench was filled. Now remember, they don’t have much water left at this point. It hasn’t rained for 3 ½ years, and here is Elijah having 12 jars of water poured out on top of an offering. I guess after 3 ½ years of Baal’s failure and after a whole day of deafening silence, the people are willing to do anything to see if Yahweh God is the true God – even pour valuable water on top of a sacrifice. But don’t miss the main point of this. The prophets of Baal had been given every advantage and yet their supposed god had remained silent. The prophet of Yahweh God had been given every disadvantage and here now adds another very significant one. If this burnt offering is to be consumed it will have to be more than a spark from Heaven. Not even a strike of lightning will suffice. It will have to be an all-consuming fire. And so in verse 36 we read: *read 36-40.*
- c. Several things stick out in these verses that exalt the glory of Yahweh God.
  - i. The brevity
    - 1. The time for the evening sacrifice has come. It has been a long day of amazing religious spectacle, and yet no answer from above. But then it is Elijah’s turn, and the brevity of the event takes your breath away. He approaches the dripping wet altar, prays a two sentence prayer, fire falls from Heaven, and it is over. The rabid religious activity that had been going on all day is contrasted in the text with the simple prayer of faith that brought an instant answer. The difference is not found in the practice, but in the theology. The practice was important. Elijah didn’t do what the prophets of Baal did because that is not how Yahweh God has instructed his servants to approach him. Elijah was careful to setup the altar as God had instructed and to prepare it as God so desired. But the answer to the

prayer was not found in practice, but rather in the One who is approached. Baal could not answer, but Yahweh was pleased to answer. Theology made all the difference, and Yahweh was pleased to answer the very first time as a clear contrast to the prophets of Baal.

ii. The prayer

1. This answer from Yahweh came after Elijah's short prayer. The content of the prayer is instructive. He makes clear who he is addressing – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He then prays for Yahweh to make it known that he is the one true God in Israel and that indeed Elijah is his servant and that this one true God has sent Elijah with His word. His cry of "Answer me, O Lord, answer me" shows the earnestness of his appeal. And then he displays his concern for the people as he ties the answer of the Lord to the people knowing that Yahweh is God and that he is at work to turn their hearts back to Him. In other words, this is not a prayer for Elijah's glory or based on Elijah's whims. He is not asking for something that he is based upon his own wrong desire that can be spent for his own liking. No, he praying solely for the glory of God and according to the will of God. The name of God is at stake here and the people's faith in this God is on the line. God must answer and consume this sacrifice for the sake of His name.

iii. The all-consuming fire

1. And so God answers with an all-consuming fire. This was no mere strike of lightning that eventually lit the sacrifice and burned it up. This was no mere partial consumption of just the bull. This was an all-consuming fire that took it all.

iv. The response of the people

1. And so in the presence of a charred spot on the ground, the Israelites respond with the only logical response. They fell on their faces and cried out, The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God. Elijah's prayer was answered. Not only was the sacrifice consumed by fire from God, but the intended result also came to be. Elijah nailed the will of God. He got it exactly right. He knew how to pray because he knew how God was thinking about the situation and he knew what would be the most glorifying thing possible in the situation, and he prayed that way. And God dramatically and quickly answered. And the people responded as they should have – with words and actions of belief.
2. This belief went beyond just bowing and declaring Yahweh's existence. They were also willing to follow through on the punishment of Baal's prophets that was ordered by Elijah. These 450 men were seized and slaughtered, like they should have been when they were first brought into the land. They were a cancer of idolatrous worship, and they needed to be purged from the land. And in the face of the obvious existence of Yahweh God and the obvious absence of Baal, the children of Israel are more than willing to follow the Law of God and expunge themselves of these evil men. Now, you may be thinking that this is a much too severe response. But you can't treat cancer with a band-aid. You must do surgery and chemo. False prophets are a cancer of the worst kind, and in the covenant community of God's people, drastic steps needed to be taken to ensure on going fidelity to the one true God.

- v. So, what are the implications for us today? Well, we can pray simply and comprehensively like Elijah did. We don't have to blabber on half the day and cut ourselves and whoop ourselves into a kinetic frenzy to gain God's attention or secure a hearing with Yahweh God. No, we can simply pray because as Jesus said, he knows what we need before we ask and so we can pray and he will hear and answer.
- vi. We can also pray with a concern for God's glory to be seen through whatever it is that we are praying about. Rather than praying for things to go well and this person to be blessed and that person to be healed and things to go well for so and so – we can pray for each of these situations that God would work according to His will so that His glory may be seen by that person and other's involved in the situation.
- vii. We must also believe in this God who has made himself so gloriously known on Carmel. Our response today should be the same as those who were there – The Lord, He is God! And this should not just cross our lips as some religious duty, but this should permeate our hearts and then our very lives. We should be willing to do war against anything that endangers our fidelity to this one true God. We should fight hard against the deceitfulness of sin and the wicked heart of unbelief that so easily besets our lives.
- d. The glory of Yahweh can hardly be missed in verses 36-40. But in verses 41-46 it may be a bit more difficult to see because Yahweh operates in a much different way than he did in verses 36-40. After the prophets of Baal have been executed Elijah returns to Carmel and says to Ahab: *read 41-46.*
- e. May I remind you that the chapter began with a word from the Lord telling Elijah to present himself to Ahab because the Lord was about to send rain upon the land. And so Elijah tells Ahab at the end of this long day to go up and eat and drink because the rain is coming. Why didn't God just send the rain upon the land? Why send his prophet and go through this day long process of disproving the prophets of Baal through the competition on Mt. Carmel? Because the sending of the fire had to precede the sending of the rain so that everyone knew that the sending of the rain was from the same God who had sent the fire. If God had just sent the rain, then the prophets of Baal would have claimed that Baal had finally been freed from Mot, the god of death, and he was once again bringing life to the land. But after the events on Carmel, no Israelites would believe that story. Baal was dead. Yahweh God was alive and the rain was from him.
- f. So, we know that the rain is coming, and Elijah knows that the rain is coming. Elijah tells Ahab to go eat and drink because the rain is coming, and what does Elijah do? Go home and rest? Go and eat a big meal after a long day of service to the Lord? No, he prays! He knows the will of God and the plan of God and so he prays to God to do the very thing that he knows God will do.
- g. This is axiomatic of how God works. He has a plan and a will and often he lets us know what that is through His clear word, and a part of his completion of that plan is our prayers. So, we know that he has a plan to save some from this world. We know that He is on a mission to redeem and rescue some from their sins. We know that He is going to do that through His people, the church, as they go and tell the Gospel and make disciples from every tribe, nation, tongue, and people. And what we see in Elijah, and in many other places in the Scripture, is that when we know so clearly the will of God and the way of God this should drive us to pray, and through those prayers God works. His will is not changed and his plan is not altered, but his will and his plan our carried out in part through the prayers of his people. Do we pray this way? Do we seek out his will and his way and allow those things to be at the heart of our prayers?

- h. But this does not mean that God will answer you immediately and send fire from heaven right after you say Amen. The contrast between how God responds to Elijah's prayer in verse 38 and in verse 44 is astounding and instructive. God's response in verse 38 was immediate. His response in verse 44 was delayed for some time until Elijah had prayed seven times and sent his servant to the summit seven times to check the clouds. And yet Elijah's prayer hadn't changed. He was still praying for the will of God to be done so that the glory of God could be seen. He was praying in line with God's clear word so he was praying for God to prove himself faithful to his word. He had told Ahab it was going to rain so he was now entreating the Lord to follow through on his promise. And yet the Lord delays.
- i. Who of us as believers in this Yahweh God have not known the kind delay of the Lord in answer to our prayer? Sometimes God answers quickly – almost right after we say Amen. I was preaching in NBCS's chapel this week and I had a powerpoint to show and a very cool video that summed up my lesson so well. So there I was 10 minutes before chapel trying to get my laptop hooked up to the TV in the Overflow room and I couldn't get my laptop to connect to the TV. So I restarted the laptop and reconnected the cord to the TV and went through the normal protocol of stuff to see if I could get it to work. And it didn't. So as my anxiety rose, I was reminded of Elijah, and I prayed. I just stopped and reminded the Lord of what I was doing and asked the Lord to help me so that I could use this tool to teach these children about the Gospel and its implications for their lives and before I even said Amen my hand had been resting on the cord that was connected to my laptop and I could feel that it was not all the way plugged in. And so I plugged it all the way in, and Viola – it worked! God answered immediately.
- j. But sometimes God delays his answer. And so for the last 2 years we have prayed that God would sell our house in PA and allow us to fully settle here in KS. And yet, just on Friday that prayer was finally answered. Next Sunday night I plan to explore this some more as I share with you all that God has taught me through his delay in answering prayer, but for now, I point you to the life of Elijah and ask – why does God do this? Why answer immediately in one instance, and then delay in another? Well, there is great mystery here isn't there? And we would be foolish to think that we could fully explain the ways and workings of our infinite God. But at least part of the answer is to be found in how God's answer to our prayers shapes our faith. What if God always answered our prayers right away? How would that shape our faith in Him? Well, you might think this would increase our faith and increase our praying. I mean just imagine. If you could just speak something to God in prayer and then it happened! The possibilities for his glory would be endless, and so would the possibilities for abuse! How easy it would be view God as man-centered, that he is here for us and He exists to make our existence better. How easy it would be to lose our way in our view of God if he always answered prayer immediately.
- k. And so, thankfully he doesn't. Sometimes he delays his answer. This delay may be to refine our request, or to purify our motives. This delay may be to make it clear to our hearts that we do not command the hand of God. This delay may be to purify our desires and make us content with God instead of always seeking his provision. Whatever the reason, we most assuredly know that His delay is for our benefit, just like the delay in verse 44 was for Elijah's benefit. It built his faith. It purified his faith. It made clear that God was in control. It made sure that everyone knew that Yahweh's plan and Yahweh's timing are not always the same as ours, and yet He is a God who can and must be trusted. So, dear brother or sister, don't stop praying. The delay to your prayer is one of the most faith-building experiences of the Christian life. Don't resent God for not answering your prayer. He is answering your prayer according to His will, and right now the delay is more necessary than the answer! Yahweh God will always show himself to be true to

His character in his answer and in his delay. He will always be good, kind, loving, and desiring for His glory to be seen.

- l. As we close I want to show you one more way that Yahweh shows himself to be true to his character. In verses 45-46 we are told that the great rain came and Elijah told Ahab to hurry to Jezreel, and then the hand of the Lord comes upon Elijah and he runs before Ahab's chariot the 17 miles to Jezreel. This running before does not mean that he simply outran the chariot, but that he actually ran in front of the chariot the whole way there. This was known to happen by a select few warriors who were especially fleet of foot, but no one would expect the prophet of God to be able to run like this. And it was an unusual work of God for Elijah to do this, as we are told in the text. Why did God enable Elijah to do this? I think it was an act of mercy and grace on Yahweh's part. Ahab was on his way to Jezreel, and in Jezreel there was the wicked queen Jezebel. Yahweh knew that Ahab would tell her all that Elijah had done by the powerful hand of God that day, and Yahweh knew what this vile queen's response would be. And so, for 17 miles he saw the faithful testimony of Yahweh God running before him, reminding him all the way that the events of this day happened because Yahweh is God, not Baal and not Jezebel! Like every rain drop that splattered on Ahab's face, every step of Elijah was a reminder to Ahab of the one true God.
- m. How gracious and kind Yahweh God is. Ahab didn't need more proof, and yet God gave it! Maybe God is graciously providing you with more proof of His existence and of his grace. Don't be an Ahab. Don't keep resisting the grace of God. Repent and believe today. Don't be doubtful like Israel. There is only one true God. Believe in Him and be saved.

**Conclusion:** So at the end of our text I wonder if you are convinced. Is Yahweh indeed the one true God? This is not just a question for the unbeliever here this morning, but this is a question for you Christian. Does your life show an unwavering belief in this one true God? When he delays his answer, do you keep praying according to His will and for His glory? When you know his will and his plan, do you pray so that it will be accomplished? Do you fight against those things that endanger your fidelity to Him? Let' pray.

Benediction:

<sup>15</sup> Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD! (Psa 144:15 ESV)