

The Signs of God's Presence

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God provides strength and encouragement for His people to face opposition on His behalf.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 1 Kings 18–19

What is your favorite movie with a “showdown”? Many Westerns, like those with John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, climax with a dramatic gunfight at the end. Sometimes, against all odds, the outnumbered guy or group wins. Sports movies, like *Hoosiers*, also tell classic stories of underdog victories.

The Bible contains showdowns, and in many cases, the underdog triumphs. Of course, none of these were “underdog” stories in the strictest sense because God’s presence was with His people and fighting for them. But from a human perspective—whether the enemies’, the observers’, or the people of God’s—the faithful rarely seemed positioned to win. And yet, they did time and time again.



What are some “showdown” stories that have already occurred in the biblical storyline up to this point?

Group Time

Point 1: God moves the hearts of His people to return to Him (1 Kings 18:31-39).

³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” ³⁴ And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

Baal’s prophets prayed from morning till evening, but Elijah’s prayer was **short** and **effective**. Prayer isn’t about length, volume, or eloquence but praying to the right God in genuine faith. Furthermore, Elijah’s prayer was all about **the glory of God**, so he prayed for rebels to **turn to God**, to respond to the truth with repentance and faith.



What should Christians believe as they pray to God?

The fire from heaven was a sure sign that God accepted Elijah’s sacrifice. God proved to everyone that He alone is God, He alone answers prayer, and He must be approached in a particular way: through faith and sacrifice. In response to God’s show of fire, the people fell facedown and acknowledged God’s singular status as God—the only proper response to God’s power and grace.

God Is One: The people of God knew, based upon God’s _____, that Yahweh, the Lord, is the only one _____ God.

Point 2: God provides strength for His servant to obey Him (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Elijah triumphantly confronted the false prophets of Baal, proving that Yahweh alone is the living God. Chapter 19, however, does not begin the way we expect, with Israel turning back to God and Elijah standing tall. Instead, we see Elijah on the run from Jezebel and depressed. What caused Elijah to despair? First, **Elijah lost perspective**. Second, **Elijah lost his commitment to follow God's word**. Third, **Elijah lost his vision of the greatness of God**. Finally, **Elijah lost his desire to live**.



Voices from Church History

"He did not tremble before the king because [God's] providence assisted him. But when he slightly turned away from him, he could not resist before Jezebel's threats."¹

—Isho'dad of Merv (d. 852)



In what ways have you identified with Elijah's struggle?

⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.


God's first response to Elijah wasn't rebuke but to eat and drink. How encouraging and tender it is that God fed His runaway prophet in grace instead of actually answering Elijah's prayer for death! God would rebuke him later, but first we see His gentleness and care. Are you drained and dejected like Elijah? Consider the humble ministry of Jesus, who gives **spiritual rest**, **physical rest**, and **companionship** for our weary lives.

Christ's Humiliation: God the Son left His glorious state and came in the _____ of sinful flesh, and He experienced a humiliating _____ on a cross by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the _____ of God.


Point 3: God reveals a remnant to His servant to encourage him (1 Kings 19:15-18).

¹⁵ And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

God demonstrated mercy here in that He kept dealing with Elijah and gave him a new assignment—to anoint some new leaders in the land. The defeat of Baal and his worshipers in Israel would not happen by Elijah alone, nor would it happen in his lifetime. Elijah’s job involved more than fighting well in the present; it also involved preparing others for the future.

 What are some steps you can take to prepare others for kingdom work in the future?

Part of Elijah’s depression stemmed from his perception that he alone remained faithful to God in Israel (1 Kings 19:10,14). But God corrected his misperception—he wasn’t the only one left; God had preserved a remnant of people faithful to Him, seven thousand, in fact. God’s sovereign saving grace among humanity was a word of assurance to Elijah, and it should be a wonderful word of assurance to us as well (Rom. 11:2-5). No matter how lonely you feel, Jesus has a people, not just from Israel but also from the nations, who have been saved by grace through faith in His name.

 Why is a gospel community so important during seasons of despair?

My Mission

Because Christ suffered and died on our behalf, we rely on God for the strength we need to deliver His message no matter the hardships we may face.

- **What lessons will you apply today regarding the importance of prayer and our need for God’s power?**
- **How can your group help foster Christian friendships and service within your local church?**
- **For whom will you be praying to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus?**

Voices from the Church

“The depressed don’t simply need to feel better. They need a Redeemer who says, ‘Take heart, my son, my daughter; what you really need has been supplied. Life no longer need be about your goodness, success, righteousness, or failure. I’ve given you something infinitely more valuable than good feelings: your sins are forgiven.’”²

—Elyse Fitzpatrick

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read 1 Kings 18:1-19

Not everyone will be called to formal ministry like Elijah, but many will be called to serve like Obadiah. Elijah's ministry was more public and confrontational; Obadiah worked quietly behind the scenes, and yet, he was faithful in the sphere where God placed him.

Obadiah was like the man or woman working for an unbelieving boss. How should you work in such an environment? Obadiah teaches us to do good work (cf. Col. 3:23-24). He was elevated to his position because he apparently did a good job.

Obadiah also illustrates how one should use their influence and resources. Obadiah had access to provisions and made them available to these persecuted prophets. Those who work in professions that allow them to receive good salaries and benefits should consider how to use such blessings to advance the kingdom. One might object, claiming that Obadiah was being deceitful, but nothing in the text says he lied or did anything unethical. He knew about suffering believers, and he used what he had to provide for them.

Finally, Obadiah teaches us to be courageous. He ultimately followed Elijah's instructions at great risk to his own life. The lesson here is that if you are ever in a position where it's either obedience to God or obedience to man, choose God—even if it might cost you your job or your life (cf. Acts 5:29).



How does Obadiah's life set an example for you to be faithful in your public vocation?

Day 2: Read 1 Kings 18:20-29

The false prophets called upon Baal from “morning until noon” (v. 26), but there was no answer. Elijah’s prayer was short, and God responded! A long prayer doesn’t mean a better prayer, especially if you are praying to the wrong god. You can pray five times a day facing any direction you want while dressed in religious garb and burning incense, candles, and more, but if you aren’t praying to the God of Elijah, you are engaging in spiritual futility.

This story is spectacular and miraculous, but the application is simple: The God of the Bible is the one true God. We have a relationship with this God by grace through faith in Christ, and He invites us to call upon Him and promises to hear us. While demonic powers are present and people may “feel something” in a false cult or religion, it doesn’t mean that their god “hears prayer” like our God. The only God who answers prayer is Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the one and only true and living God.



How does this story encourage you to pray more faithfully and fervently?

Day 3: Read 1 Kings 18:30-46

We learn three important lessons on prayer from Elijah’s petition on Mount Carmel. *First, have a relationship with the living God.* Elijah prayed to the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We too can call upon God, and even call Him “Father,” if we know Him by grace through faith in Christ (Mark 14:36)—and He hears us.

Second, seek the glory of God. Elijah’s prayer was God-centered. He wanted people to recognize the glory of God. Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” (Matt. 6:9-11). Before He taught us to pray for things like bread, holiness, and forgiveness, Jesus taught us to long for God’s name to be glorified and God’s kingdom to cover the earth.

Third, pray for idolaters to turn to the living God. Elijah prayed that God would turn the people’s hearts back to Himself. He prayed that they would know and respond to the truth. Let us pray for God to turn idol worshipers into Christ worshipers (1 Thess. 1:9-10).



How are you praying for God’s glory to be made known in your home, your church, your city, and around the world?

Day 4: Read 1 Kings 19:1-8

Have you ever said, “I’ve had enough, Lord”? If so, then you can identify with Elijah. You will have times in your life when you are drained physically and emotionally. You may have times when you are also exhausted spiritually as you keep giving, giving, and giving. You may also lose sight of the glory of God’s greatness as your circumstances overwhelm you. The good news in this story is that God is gracious to His weary saints. He gave Elijah food and rest; He spoke to Elijah from the mountain; and He gave Elijah a new vision for the future.

Make sure you take care of yourself physically. Make sure you are hearing and studying God’s Word. And ask God to give you a compelling vision for how you should fulfill the Great Commission. Don’t throw in the towel, but instead, strive to receive God’s renewing grace and press on.



Why is it important for Christians to maintain healthy rest, along with good eating habits and faithful rhythms of work and recreation?

Day 5: Read 1 Kings 19:9-18

As Elijah stood before the Lord, the Lord “passed by,” and a great wind tore through the mountains (v. 11). Then there was an earthquake, and then a fire. But the Lord was not in these powerful displays. Instead, after the fire, Elijah heard a “low whisper” (v. 12).

Previously, God showed up with fire, consuming the drenched altar. People marveled. But here, the emphasis is on God’s quiet ways. God often appears not in the spectacular but in the gentle whisper. Job 4:16 and Psalm 107:29 also refer to an almost silent sound, and the context of both passages is one of rest and refreshment in the midst of pain, distress, and fear.

Let’s remember that God often works in quiet ways. Sometimes the fire seems to fall in corporate gatherings, but God is always working quietly through His written Word and by His Spirit in the hearts of His people. Seek the God of grace in the quiet place. Get alone with Him and listen to His Word.



What is your plan for pursuing quiet communion with God on a daily basis?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God moves the hearts of His people to return to Him (1 Kings 18:31-39).
- God provides strength for His servant to obey Him (1 Kings 19:5-8).
- God reveals a remnant to His servant to encourage him (1 Kings 19:15-18).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



When are you most prone to lose confidence in God's power?



In what ways has God demonstrated His superiority to other gods in your life?

Notes

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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