

ELIJAH AND AHAB

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Lessons: *I Kings 17-18*

The story of these two chapters begins with the saying that there will be no rain or dew for years, and it comes to an end at last with an abundance of rain. So many things happen, so many interesting things, between that beginning and end that it is hard to remember them all. And what we find in these happenings is a picture of goodness and a picture of evil. We see what is right and good clearly illustrated, and we see what is wrong also shown. Then there is the choosing between them, leading at last to the return of the rain.

As you know, the evil in the story is in Ahab, the worst king the children of Israel ever had. Stirred by his evil wife Jezebel, Ahab was such a bad influence that Elijah was sent to say that no more rain would fall from heaven.

And where is the goodness in the story? First we see it in the almost unbelievable kindness of a widow woman. One could hardly imagine a greater degree of kindness when Elijah tested her. First Elijah asked if she would give him a drink of water. There she was in a land where water was precious; she felt she and her son could not live much longer, and yet she was willing to think of the need of someone else who was thirsty. As she went to get the water, he tested her further by asking her to bring some food. But then he assured her that from then on, her kindness would have a source that would never fail.

The real good, the real giver, is the Lord. The wicked King Ahab could do nothing for this woman and her people; the false god Baal could do nothing to bring the rain; but the Lord could. For He is the source of life itself, which Elijah showed in giving life back to the son who had died.

And at last the time came for people to decide between the goodness of the Lord and the worship of Baal. At that time of decision, the number of Baal's prophets was in the hundreds. They were trying to persuade the people to follow Ahab and Jezebel in the foolish worship of their god. And how many prophets of the Lord were there at the time of decision? Only one – Elijah. But that one prophet of the Lord made the powerful call to the people to come to the mountain and decide. On a mountain that looks down upon the great sea he put the question to them: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (*I Kings 18:21*).

And what did the people answer? Not a single word. They couldn't make up their minds. Sometimes they believed in the Lord, and sometimes they were

fooled by the prophets of Baal. Sometimes we are like them, since at times it is very clear to us what really matters in life. But at other times we do things and say things and think things which are foolish. Yes, foolish. These people needed to see how foolish and silly were the prophets of Baal. Those prophets were given all the time they wanted to call on Baal to bring fire from heaven. They could shout and shout for hours and finally carry on in a ridiculous way. And when Elijah had shown their foolishness and lack of power, he gently called the people and said, "Come near to me."

Elijah did not scream or jump on the altar. He said, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that the people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again" (I *Kings* 18:37).

Then the fire from heaven came and showed the truth in such a powerful way. The people fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (I *Kings* 18:39).

While no rain had fallen when they turned to Baal and followed after Ahab, the turning to the Lord brought new hope. Elijah went up to the top of that same mountain and first saw a small cloud like a man's hand. Then came the abundance of rain.