

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 14 JUNE 2016

1 Kings 18:17-46

Over the last few weeks we have heard how Paul was chosen to serve God after Jesus had gone back to heaven. But right from the beginning of time, there have always been people who served God, and I am sure that, as Paul was growing up, he would have been taught about them.

One of these heroes was a man called Elijah. He lived long before Jesus was born when there was a very wicked king reigning over Israel. The Bible says that Ahab (1Kgs 16:30) did more evil 'than all [the kings] who were before him' and that he angered God 'more than had all the Kings of Israel before him'! Among other things, Ahab chose to marry Princess Jezebel who didn't believe that God was the only one who should be worshipped. Instead of helping her to realise that idols were just man-made, Ahab joined her in worshipping Baal, paying for a temple to be built, and even allowing Jezebel to provide food for 400 heathen priests every day.

To force Ahab to his senses, God sent a terrible drought – there wasn't neither rain nor dew! But Ahab refused to give in. He just went on worshipping Baal.

After 3 years, God took pity on his people who were suffering and sent his special messenger Elijah to Ahab to prove to him that the God of Israel was the only real God.

To prove this, Elijah organised a competition: 850 prophets of idols vs 1 prophet of God. That doesn't sound very fair, but that's what Elijah proposed. Each 'side' was to build an altar on Mount Carmel, to put a sacrifice on the altar and then to ask their god to light the fire. The god who did so would obviously be the real God.

Baal's prophets thought this would be a piece of cake. After all, they thought Baal was the storm god and his symbol was a lightning flash which would light any fire! So they went first. They got everything ready and then called on Baal to light the fire. At midday they were still calling on him to answer and they were no longer quite so cheerful. They were so tired they were just limping around calling on him. Elijah teased them, suggesting that Baal was deep in thought or on a journey far away or maybe even resting! This spurred Baal's prophets on and they 'raved' all afternoon, even cutting themselves with swords to try to get Baal's attention. Still no fire!

Then it was Elijah's turn. He called everyone closer perhaps so they could see for themselves that he wasn't cheating. First, he carefully rebuilt the broken altar of God which had been unused for so long. Then he dug a trench around the altar before laying out the sacrifice on it – but he wasn't finished yet. He called for 4 big pots to be filled with water. I wonder if the people muttered about what he wanted so much water for. Perhaps they were horrified when he threw this precious water over the altar and the wood and the sacrifice. But Elijah

just called for another 8 jars of water and threw that over everything. Soon the trench was full and the altar and the wood and the sacrifice was sopping wet. Then very quietly, he asked God to show everyone that he was the only true God.

God's answer came immediately. The fire he sent was so fierce that it burned the sacrifice, the wood, the altar and the water! The people fell on their faces and admitted that 'The Lord - He is God'. They had no more need for Baal or his prophets.

And the rain came soon afterwards. When the first tiny cloud appeared, Elijah told Ahab to hurry home. The Lord gave Elijah the power and speed to run in front of Ahab's carriage for the whole 27 kms back to his palace!

How could anyone argue with that Baal was still important! And yet Jezebel did. She didn't stop to think about what the contest had proved; she just wanted to see Elijah dead. Despite his victory, Elijah panicked and fled in despair.

But the story doesn't end there. God was there for Elijah in his fears, just as he had been with Elijah in his victory. God fed him, strengthened him, forgave him and continued to use him.

Anyone who serves God has great moments and weak moments. I find it very comforting to know that God is there in my good times and my bad times. And what's true for me can be true for you if you are prepared to admit that 'The Lord - he is God'.