

Explore the Bible: The Power of One

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- *The Explore the Bible Lesson for July 10th focuses on 1 Kings 18:25-39*

I always have cheered for the underdog. I am a Dallas Cowboys fan, so I am used to it. Underdogs are special. How can you not cheer for the guy or girl who is the long shot and winds up being a winner? We love those stories of triumph despite challenges and impossible odds.

During this past summer Olympics in Tokyo, Japan, Wayland Baptist University alum Tamyra Mensah-Stock won the gold medal in her weight class. It was a fantastic victory, especially considering she began wrestling in the 10th grade and did not compete in the previous summer Olympics in Brazil. Tamyra overcame some challenges to become an Olympic gold medalist. She said: "I knew I could do it. From when I first started wrestling, I felt I could be an Olympic champ. I did it!" As a professor at Wayland, I know first-hand how incredibly proud we are of Tamyra.

In the study for this week, the prophet Elijah is on the scene confronting one of the worst kings of Israel, King Ahab. Elijah is the underdog in this story. The spiritual situation in Israel is bleak. Idolatrous worship is rampant, and sin is an epidemic in Israel. In response to Israel's sin, Yahweh has sent a drought. The drought became a metaphor for Israel's dry spiritual condition.

If we are honest, we have all lived through these dry spiritual seasons. It becomes cumbersome to read God's word or pray, and sometimes during these dry seasons, going to church no longer is something we look forward to. It seems that Yahweh is far from us, like we need some spiritual rain to water our spirits and give us renewal.

Israel needs renewal, and the prophet Elijah will be in a showdown with the numerous prophets of Baal. The stage is set. It is one prophet against so many. One prophet is ready to show the others that there is indeed one God who will demonstrate his great power and the emptiness of idolatrous worship despite the numerous worshippers.

Ineffective Faith (1 Kings 18:25-29)

The challenge was pretty simple. Each side would prepare a sacrifice, and the true deity would respond with fire from heaven. Vastly outnumbered, the prophet Elijah told the 450 prophets of Baal to go first and attempt to summon fire from heaven. Baal represented the central deity in Caananite worship. His name connotes “Lord” or “One who rules.”

By Elijah, letting the prophets of Baal go first is a bold move. It gave the opposing prophets a slight advantage by going first. Baal was known to be a god who controlled the weather. It should have been an easy challenge for a god who ruled the skies. However, hours passed, and no response from Baal. The 450 prophets began to dance and shout, hoping Baal would hear them and respond.

Elijah began mocking the prophets of Baal, saying that maybe Baal was sleeping, or on a trip, or still thinking about his response. Either way, the prophets of Baal took their pleas to the next level and began to cut themselves. Blood was dripping off their bodies as they danced or wavered according to the Hebrew word, back and forth, shouting in hopes that Baal would hear them and respond. The result was a deafening silence.

Effective Faith (1 Kings 18:30-35)

It is now evening, and Israel had witnessed the ineffective antics of the 450 prophets of Baal all day. There was still no fire from heaven. It is Elijah’s

turn to call down fire from heaven. He gathers Israel to watch him prepare his sacrifice. It is important to note that Elijah rebuilt an altar that had previously been used to sacrifice to Yahweh, which had since been laid waste due to idolatrous worship. Elijah used the twelve stones that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Although at that present time, Israel was divided, the symbolism of Elijah unifying all twelve stones for Yahweh's altar was understood.

Once the altar and the sacrifice were ready, Elijah made a trench around the sacrifice. I'm sure the spectators were wondering what the trench's purpose was. He then asked for water to be poured over the sacrifice, the wood, and the altar. He asked for four pots to be filled with water and poured over the sacrifice three times. The water filled the trench and soaked the altar, yet his faith in Yahweh was firm. Elijah did not want anyone leaving that experience doubting the power of Yahweh.

The Response (1 Kings 18:36-39)

Elijah calls on Yahweh to demonstrate his power and presence in the sight of Israel. Yahweh responds immediately; Elijah had not even finished his prayer before Yahweh sent fire to consume the sacrifice. The contrast between a silent Baal and the quick responding Yahweh was stark.

Israel falls face down in worship and submission to Yahweh in this unforgettable experience. Elijah concludes his prayer by calling on Israel to stop dancing or wavering, the Hebrew word, between idolatrous worship and obedience to Yahweh. What are we wavering with today? What are things we chase after that leave us empty in the end? Let us live in the strength to be willing to stand alone in our convictions and faith.

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