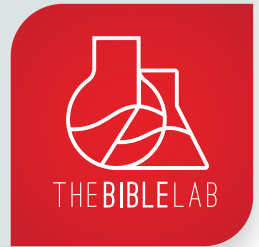




GOD OF FIRE & RAIN

—THE STORY OF—
ELIJAH & GOD

4



YES, NO & MAYBE

1. I've seen more proof of God's existence than the people sitting near me.
2. I'm the kind of person who typically has a "backup plan."
3. God shouldn't have to prove His existence.
4. God wants to wrestle with us.
5. True faith always involves risk

DIG DEEPER

➤ READ 1 Kings 18:16-39 (NIV)

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. 19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." 20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. 22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." 25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." 26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. 27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. 30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." 32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs[a] of seed. 33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." 34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. 36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

- Have you ever witnessed a miracle that fully convinced you that God is very real?

» **19 Mount Carmel** - It's a fitting site since it lay between Israel and Phoenicia, the lands of the deities in question. Also Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. No doubt Ahab was highly pleased with this suggested site for the contest because it would have given the Baal prophets a definite advantage; but this did not worry Elijah. It was also a geographically prominent location and thus a fit setting for Elijah's contest.

» **21 "How long will you waver between two opinions?"** - The phrase "two opinions" uses the Hebrew word *saif*, which means "crutches made from two sticks." So an alternative translation might be, "How long will you limp about on two crutches?" The point of this metaphor was not about wavering between two opinions, but about the damage Israel was doing to itself by refusing to follow the Lord only.

• Why do you think people spiritually hedge their bets, instead of trusting fully in God? What does it say about God that He doesn't give up on us even when we choose to trust in other things?

» **24 The god who answers by fire** - Baal was supposedly a fertility god, the one who sent rain, caused the crops to grow, and provided food for his people. **He was the one who supposedly sent fire (lightning) from heaven.** The three-and-one-half-year drought and famine had been a great embarrassment to the worshipers of Baal. It seemed as if Elijah and his God rather than Baal were in control of the fertility of Israel. So Elijah's test to Baal's followers seemed like a good opportunity to vindicate their god and they readily agreed to it.

• Why do you think God chose a test of fire from heaven, instead of sending rain as proof instead?

» **24-35 Choose** - The way Elijah set everything up was to exclude all suspicion of fraud. It would almost seem as if tricks not unlike that practiced year by year at the Greek Easter at Jerusalem were familiar to that age. Some of the fathers expressly state that the idolatrous priests of an earlier time were accustomed to set fire to the sacrifice from hollow places concealed beneath the altar, and it was an old tradition (found in Ephrem Syrus, and Chrysostom) that the Baal prophets had concealed a man for that purpose beneath their altar, but that he had died from suffocation (Stanley).

» **27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them.** - Sarcastically he suggested that Baal was thinking about other things, or **busy** (lit., relieving himself), away on a **trip** (the Phoenician sailors believed Baal traveled with them on the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere), or even **sleeping!** Surprisingly Baal's prophets responded by increasing the fervor of their appeals, working themselves into a frenzy. Baal did not respond to their six-hour chanting for lightning, though rain and lightning often come readily to the Carmel mountain range near the Mediterranean Sea.

• Elijah is so confident in his God that he begins taunting the Baal prophets. Do you think that was something that God inspired, or was it coming from Elijah's confidence in His God?

» **36 "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel"** - Elijah did not say "Jacob," but "Israel," possibly for two reasons. One is that God had answered Jacob in a crisis, changing his name to Israel, the one who struggles with God. Now a great battle is going on too, and Elijah is fighting his own fight, not willing to let God go until He blesses. Another reason is that "Israel" was the more common name of the whole people who needed this demonstration of who is God.

« What does it say about God that he wrestles with mankind when they are going the wrong way?

» **38 burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.** - Not even a stone or a drop of extra water was left. At first the people gasped in astonishment. Right before their eyes was evidence. God had won the battle of the gods. Baal had done nothing even in hours; God had done it all, and done it quickly. After hitting the ground in reverence, they cried out, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."

« What does it say about God that He would burn up everything, even the rocks, instead of just burning the animal sacrifice?



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MY PRAYER...

1. What things am I using as spiritual crutches instead of following God only?
2. How has God already proved Himself as real in my life?
3. What new aspect of God's character does He want me to know?