

OUR POWERFUL GOD

by Laurel Mast

KEY VERSE:

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God." I Kings 18:39

FAITH STORY:

I Kings 18:20-40

FAITH FOCUS:

The people of Israel were disobeying God by worshiping Baal, so God sent the prophet Elijah to tell King Ahab that there would be a famine in the land. In the third year of the drought, God told Elijah to go to Ahab and tell him and all of the people to meet him on Mt. Carmel. There they had a test to see whose god was the most powerful by building an altar and asking their God to set it on fire. After Baal's prophets danced and cried out for Baal to set fire to their altar, Elijah built an altar of twelve stones and poured twelve jars of water on it and asked God to set the altar on fire. God answered Elijah and showed the people who the most powerful God is. The people then saw that "The Lord indeed is God" and God further showed his power by sending rain on the land and ending the drought.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students discover that God is the most powerful God.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students should be able to:

- 1 Explain how God showed the people that Yahweh God is above the god Baal
- 2 Identify some possible gods/idols in their life and list comparisons of the differences between them and God

Identify a time when they have seen God work in their life.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Misc items such as a pen, band aid, tea bag, cup, ruler, comb, toy, snack food—other items you think of that could symbolize what type of person God is to different people. (Protector, healer, friend, comforter, law-giver, provider, someone who keeps things in order, etc.)
- 2 paper and pens
- 3 Bibles for each student
- 4 Be familiar with the background to the story so you can tell it rather than reading it to the class.
- 5 A CD with a praise song that your students would enjoy, and a CD player.
- 6 12 rocks for the altar and any other props you'd like to use for the drama.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to name people they consider to be powerful—in their community, the country, the world. Discuss what makes these persons powerful? Money? Status? World recognition? The ability to make things happen? Ask students which powerful persons they respect the most, and talk about how the persons they respect use their power.

CONNECT: (5–10 minutes)

Display the items on the table and ask students to choose one item that symbolizes God's power or what kind of person God is to them. Go around the group and ask them to explain what they chose and why.

Say: *Today's story is about Yahweh, the God of Israel, versus the god Baal, and what happens when they have a competition to see whose the most powerful.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20–25 minutes)

Explain the following background to today's story.

- The King of Israel, Ahab, married Jezebel, who brought into their marriage Baal worship. Baal was a Canaanite god of storm, weather, and fertility. Baal was the most significant god in this culture because their culture was based on agriculture, so Baal, the god of storm and fertility, was very important to the people. The land depended on rain.
- Ahab did evil in the eyes of God and joined his wife in worshipping of Baal. He built an altar and worshiped Baal and led the people of Israel astray. The prophet Elijah then received a word from God and told Ahab that there would be no rain until he declared so. Thus, there was a famine in Israel.
- The third year of the drought God told Elijah to go to Ahab. This is where our story of Elijah comes in. The test on Mt. Carmel was not only to see whose altar would burn—Baal's or God's—but also to see which god would bring rain on the land. The people needed to decide which god they were going to serve because Israel could only have one god.

Choose students or ask for volunteers to play the role of the narrator, Elijah, and two bulls in a skit of today's story. The rest of the class should be divided in half—one group is Baal's prophets and the other group is "the people."

Ask students to read the passage from I Kings 18:20-40 and plan how they will play their parts.

When they are ready, go through the skit, with the narrator reading and the other students acting out their parts.

When the skit is over, discuss the story. Ask: How did God prove himself to be more powerful than Baal? (God brought a drought on the land, sent heavenly fire on to his altar and totally destroyed it, and showered the land with rain ending the drought. There were 450 of Baal's prophets who cried out and danced about, but Baal still could not set fire to the altar. There was one man, Elijah, who asked God to show his power to the people and he did.)

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Hand out slips of paper and ask students to write down ten things that they spend most of their time doing. Collect the slips and tally the score on a blackboard or on poster board. Possible examples: watching TV, listening to music, spending time with a boyfriend/girlfriend, playing sports, reading, shopping, homework, hanging out with friends, on the computer with friends, practicing music, eating, sleeping, worrying, stressing out, etc.

Ask: *Is it possible that some or all of these activities are Baal's in our lives? Discuss. Why or why not are they like a "false god"?*

Ask students to compare the gods in their lives to God. What do our activities provide for us? (Friendship, security, entertainment, etc.) What can and has God provided for us? How can we find ways to make God the God of our lives? If we would do that, would it be worthwhile? Would it be worth the effort?

RESPOND: (3–5 minutes)

Say: *Whether we have thought about it or not, we have all experienced the power of God in our lives. Let's take a few minutes to praise God for God's power and for all that God has done for us!*

Play the CD and encourage youth to either sing along or listen and praise God in their own way.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

King Ahab, son of Omri, was king of Israel. He married a woman named Jezebel, the daughter of a Sidonian King. Jezebel brought to their marriage the worship of Baal. Baal was a Canaanite god of storm, weather, and fertility. Baal was the most significant god in this culture because their culture was based on agriculture, so Baal, the god of storm and fertility, was very important to the people. The land depended on rain. Symbols of Baal included a warrior clutching lightning as a weapon and also a bull.¹

Ahab did evil in the eyes of God and joined his wife in worship of Baal. He built an altar and worshipped Baal and led the people of Israel astray. The prophet Elijah then received a word from God and told Ahab that there would be no rain until he declared so. Thus, there was a famine in Israel.

The third year of the drought God told Elijah to go to Ahab. This is where our story of Elijah comes in. The test on Mt. Carmel was not only to see whose altar would burn—Baal's or God's—but to see which god would bring rain on the land. The people needed to decide which god they were going to serve because Israel could only have one god, and this was a test to show who was the most powerful.

The prophets of Baal, numbering 450, cried out to Baal and leaped and danced around the altar for Baal to set fire on it, but nothing happened. Elijah teased them saying, "Where is your God?" He encouraged them to cry out louder in case Baal could not hear them, so they did. They began to cut themselves in hopes that Baal would not answer them. This continued all day until evening time, just before sunset, and still nothing had happened.

Elijah then built an altar made of twelve stones and he poured twelve jars of water on the altar, which represented the twelve tribes of Israel.² He did not dance about the altar, cut himself, or cry out, but addressed God as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" to remind the

people of their relationship to God and to the patriarchs and matriarchs. God then answered Elijah and showed the people who the real God was and is. God sent down fire on the altar and it burned not only the sacrifice, but also the entire altar. The people, seeing this, said that the Lord is indeed God. The name Lord is a divine title. It means superiority and authority. When the people stated, "The Lord indeed is God," they were saying, "The one who is superior and has authority—he is God!" The people realized how powerful God is, that he is the most powerful God and they praised God for it.

God further showed his power by sending rain on the land and ending the drought (vv. 41-46)

END NOTES:

¹David Noel Freedman, Ed., **Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000) p.134.

²Simon J. DeVries, **World Biblical Commentary: 1 Kings** (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishing, 1985) p. 229.