

Elijah and the false prophets (1 Kings 18 and 19)

We learned about Kings Saul and David and there were lots of kings that followed them. Some did pray to God and ask for help in leading the people but some liked to be powerful and important and forgot that it was God who was really powerful and not them. Some were really very bad and were not at all fair to the people they ruled over. One of the bad kings was called Ahab.

We also learned that God spoke to his people through the prophets – Moses, Samuel and others. One of God's prophets was called Elijah. Prophets often had to pass on messages that people didn't like to hear.

Elijah the prophet and King Ahab were alive at the same time in history. King Ahab was an unfair king. He did not love God and instead was worshipping the false god Baal, who was just a statue. People sometimes like to bow down to a statue and think that it has a special power.

Elijah the prophet had a difficult job to do. He went to see King Ahab and said, "Ahab you are very wicked. Get all the people of Israel and all the prophets who worship Baal and we will meet at Mount Carmel."

The Israelites arrived at Mount Carmel; there were lots and lots of them. Most of the people were not sure who the real God was; they tried to worship both God and Baal at the same time. The prophets of Baal arrived too. Then Elijah turned to everybody and spoke.

"Who is the true God? We will find out! We will build two altars of stone" (an altar is a sort of table). "One will be for Baal and one for my God. We will put wood on the altars. Then we will pray. The prophets of Baal will pray to Baal to send fire to burn the wood on the altar. I will pray to my God to send fire to burn the wood. The god who answers with fire is the true God."

So, all the prophets of Baal built their altar. There were 400 prophets and they all started calling out to their god.....but nothing happened. No-one answered their prayer. They began to dance and shout at the same time; still nothing happened.

Elijah said, "Call louder, maybe Baal is busy, maybe he is on a trip, maybe he is asleep!" The prophets shouted louder and louder, but guess what? Nothing happened. No smoke, not even a little spark of flame, nothing.

Now it was Elijah's turn. He dug a ditch around his altar. He poured loads of water on the altar. The wood was soaking wet, the altar was soaking wet and even the ditch was filled with water. Would this ever light? Could God make fire to burn the wood with so much water on it?

Then Elijah prayed to God. "Oh Lord God, please show all the people that you are the true God. Please send fire to burn this wood."

And God sent fire. It burned up all the wood. It burned up the altar. It even burned up all the water in the ditch! I expect all the people watching were amazed and perhaps there was a gasp from the crowd.

Then everyone knew that God was the true God. They knew that there was only one God and he was the one that Elijah the prophet spoke about and spoke to.

At that time there had been no rain in the land of Israel for a long time. The land was dry and nothing was growing. There was not enough food for everybody. Elijah climbed to the very top of the mountain. He knelt down and sent his helper to look out to sea. The helper came back and said there was nothing to be seen. Six times Elijah sent his helper to look. Six times he couldn't see anything unusual. But the seventh time the helper saw a small cloud in the distance. Elijah stood up and sent his helper to tell Ahab to hurry home before the rain. The clouds began to gather and the wind began to blow. The whole sky was black, it was about to pour with rain. Ahab set off quickly. Elijah remembered what God had done in answering his prayer and showing the prophets of Baal his power and he felt full of God's strength, so he ran ahead of Ahab's horses all the way to the city gates.

And it rained and rained and rained because that was just what was needed.