

Bible Studies for Life: August 15

Serve with Loyalty • 1 Kings 18:20-26, 31-39

By Clay Anthony



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We love a good underdog story. From David vs. Goliath to Rocky vs. Apollo, there is something that makes us root for the little guy. When the odds are stacked for one side, we tend to lean in so as to see what will become of the one facing the battle. I think we see a little bit of ourselves in the underdog. We all have insurmountable odds to face at times, and we just want to prove to ourselves and others what we are made of.

Today's text shows odds stacked upon odds against God's man, Elijah. One man's faith is set against several hundred skilled prophets of a false god. If that were not enough, the king of the land is not too high on Elijah, either (v. 17). Regardless of the odds against him, Elijah possessed a knowledge of how God could work through him.

It is a bold person who will give orders to a government leader bent on his/her destruction (v. 18). This is how Elijah was viewed by Ahab, king of Israel. There was something abnormal about a man who would ignore government edicts that were against Godly principles. What were Elijah's best qualities?

Always Loyal (vv. 20-21). We being good Baptists are not much for dancing, but this passage brings to light the challenge facing Elijah involved just that. The people of Israel are asked a question on a national level, “How long will they *waver or limp* (ESV) between false gods and the One true God?”

We see that same verbiage used in verse 26 when the false prophets *limped* before the altar. In the Hebrew language this is the word for dancing. The prophets were dancing before Baal, their god, and the nation of Israel was dancing between the truth and a lie.

Not Elijah, however. He was always loyal to the God he knew best. He had experienced the realness of God and no amount dancing or numbers set against him or commands from an evil king could sway him (no pun intended).

Always Fair (vv. 22-26). If nothing else, Elijah is seen as a man of principle. As you read these verses, note how polite he is. He is the one who proposes a duel of sorts between himself and the followers of Baal.

We have often heard that he faced down 450 prophets, but a little math teaches us that the odds set against him were far greater (v. 19). He was the underdog. Elijah allowed the prophets to do their bidding first. He allowed them to choose their bull and cry out first. It is as if he did not desire to appear anxious, but relaxed.

Why is this sense of fairness so important for us? The lesson is that we have nothing to fear from other gods. People around us are free to worship as they wish, or not to worship at all. We have no reason to fears others’ worship nor their prayers, because we have no reason to fear their gods. They simply are not real. So, as Elijah shows, we should relax and let them do their best. They nor their gods have nothing on our true God.

Always confident (vv. 31-39). Notice the silence alluded to in verse 26. Baal says nothing. He is fake; he cannot speak. Note earlier though when asked about wavering between two positions, the people of Israel said nothing as well (v. 21). Elijah is the one barking out orders about bulls, wooden altars, and water.

There seems to be much noise going on, yet Elijah is the only one making any sense. Why? Verse 36 is key: Elijah knows precisely who to cry out to. He cries out to the One and only True God. Elijah also desires all credit to go where it is due. He wants everyone far and wide to know that what they are about to see is done by the hand of God.

How is this confident? Did you catch the words of Elijah's prayer? He prays, "*I have done all these things at your word*" (v. 36). No fire has fallen from the sky and yet Elijah is calling his shot. That is not name-it-and-claim-it, bad theology. That is knowing the track record of the One you are dealing with. The One who brought a widow's son back to life can surely handle a few hundred false teachers calling on their fake god.

Now that we think of it, in this scene who exactly were the underdog weaklings with the odds stacked against them?

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