

// ILLUSTRATION //

Have you ever seen God do something really cool? Like a miracle? Or give you some crazy breakthrough?

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to talk with one of my **cousins** who lives in **Washington**. And he was asking me if I had ever seen any tangible miracles. So I had the opportunity to share with him a couple really cool things I've seen God do.

In 2010, I got to experience the first big miracle that happened in front of me. It was at the 2010 Praise Chapel World Conference, and a **woman** who was **blind** had her sight restored.

At Hope, during one of our **Bible Studies**, a **woman's hip** was put back in place.

At **Hope**, during one of our services, a woman was healed of **arthritis** in her hand.

At Hope, during another one of our **Bible Studies**, a man was healed of pain he had near his **rib cage**.

At Warrior Center, we prayed for **Bobalou's eye** and it was instantly healed.

Those are just a few things off the top of my head.

// INTRODUCTION //

If you're like me, when you see God do a miracle, or God do something really significant in your life, like give you a breakthrough in some area of your life, **you get like a spiritual high**.

In those times, I feel on top of the world. I feel sky high.

In Christianity, there will be times where we see God move, or we experience spiritual victories. These times are great, and they should be cherished.

But there is a danger we need to be aware of, and I believe the Bible illustrates this clearly to us.

So this morning, I want to talk about a man who had a **mountaintop experience** – his name was **Elijah**.

We will be in **1 Kings 18**, if you would like to make your way there.

// BACKGROUND //

At this time, Israel had a king named **Ahab**.

Ahab reigned for **22 years**. He was the **most wicked** of all the kings of Israel.

He was married to a foreign woman, **Jezebel**, who inevitably led him into the worship of a foreign god, Baal. She built a temple for Baal in Samaria, **maintained 850 prophets** of Baal and Ashtoreth, **killed God's prophets**, and abolished the worship of the Lord. Her name is later used for prophetesses who sought to seduce the church to commit spiritual adultery (Revelation 2:20).

In 1 Kings 17, God calls Elijah to tell Ahab that He is going to **withhold dew** and rain from the land, and there will be a drought.

Then after some time, and when the famine in the land was severe, **God calls Elijah to go back to Ahab** and tell him that He will send rain upon the earth.

And this is where we are picking up, in 1 Kings 18:17-40.

// SCRIPTURE: 1 KINGS 18:17-40, 19:1-4 //

¹⁷When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" ¹⁸And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. ¹⁹Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

1 Kings 18:17-19

Baal is not strictly a name, but a title (meaning “**lord**”) for the ancient Semitic god Hadad—“Lord Hadad” (Baal-hadad). Known texts depict Baal (Hadad) as a **storm god**; the **fertility** of the land depends on his sending rain. He is **son** of the high god El and **husband** of the goddess Anat; his enemies are Yam (“**Sea**”) and Mot (“**Death**”); his weapons are **thunder** and **lightning**; and his symbolic representation is the **bull**. Baal worship presented an attractive alternative or supplement to the worship of the Lord (Yahweh) for many Israelites throughout their time in Canaan, no doubt partly because that land was so utterly dependent on rain for its fertility.

The goddess **Asherah** is known as the **wife** of the chief god El and the **mother** of the gods. The **Asherim** were cult symbols connected with the worship of this goddess, probably **wooden** artifacts representing a tree (cf. Deut. 16:21, which suggests that sometimes an “Asherah” could actually *be* a tree; Hos. 4:12).

In Canaanite religion, Baal had authority over rain and fertility. The absence of rain meant the absence of Baal, who must periodically submit to the god of death Mot (during the dry season), only to be revived at a later date and once again water the earth (during the rainy season). This cyclical and polytheistic view of reality is the focus of Elijah’s challenges.

²⁰ So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. ²¹ And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word. ²² Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.” ²³ Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. ²⁴ And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.” ²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the

name of your god, but put no fire to it.”²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. ²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.”³⁴ And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

1 Kings 18:20-35

The whole area is saturated with water so that there is no possibility of natural combustion. If this offering is consumed in fire, it must be the Lord’s doing.

³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have

turned their hearts back.”³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.”⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

1 Kings 18:36-40

The fire of the LORD consumes not only the burnt offering and the wood but also the inflammable stones and the saturated dust, as well as the water that was in the trench. This cannot be the result of any natural phenomenon, since even lightning would not consume the stones. As all the people realize, this fire can only be a special work of God.

¹Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”

1 Kings 19:1-2

Elijah has won a mighty battle on the mountain. But **victory now becomes defeat** as Queen Jezebel seeks to kill Elijah.

Jezebel plays a major role in governing Israel. Together with Ahab, she wants to punish Elijah for killing prophets of Baal. This is a **serious danger** because Jezebel has a history of killing the prophets of the Lord. **Jezebel’s oath** calls down a penalty on herself if she should fail to kill Elijah within a day’s time.

³Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is

enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah has shown himself to be a **man of faith and courage** who **trusts God** for miracles and, above all, moves to locations only in response to God’s commands.

Elijah’s ministry had been a ministry of **miracles, fire,** and the sword.

He had caused **severe drought**, had been **sustained by ravens** and by a **jar of flour and jug of oil that never ran out**, had **raised the dead**, had **called down fire** from heaven, had **slain the prophets of Baal** with the sword, and had **brought rain** to the land.

But the shock of **Jezebel’s resistance** after Mount Carmel has led Elijah to **forget to think theologically**, so he flees – he goes as far away from Jezebel as he can get.

// SPIRITUAL VICTORIES ARE OFTEN FOLLOWED BY SPIRITUAL ATTACKS //

Elijah’s experience in the wilderness teaches a valuable lesson.

After his incredible victory over the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, his **joy turned to sorrow** when he was pursued by Jezebel and fled for his life. Such “mountaintop” experiences are often followed by a letdown, and by discouragement.

Spiritual victories are often followed by spiritual attacks.

I’ve seen this happen countless times.

Coming up as a disciple, every time I would agree to preach, the devil would attack my marriage.

In 2015, I became the **Assistant Pastor** at Warrior Center, and maybe a month or 2 in, our marriage got attacked like never before. I was 100% percent convinced there was no hope. One little problem exploded into a giant mess.

When Cynthia and I were announced at conference to start this church, that **last month at Warrior Center** was the hardest. We had made a decision to plant a church, and we were all excited. Then people started talking about me behind my back. It made me so upset. I just wanted to run away.

After we had Micah, we had been trying to have more children, but it just wasn't happening. Then finally, after 6 years, Cynthia gets pregnant, and she has a **miscarriage**.

I remember **a story that Pastor Bobby shares** about a time he went to Mexico to preach. He had taken Debra with him, and as soon as they got there, she got incredibly sick. Like crazy sick. And at one point, he actually saw demons chaining her up. It was on that trip that many lives were saved, and even one of the top drug kingpins got saved.

At Hope/Warrior Center, God usually deals with people.

This is a place of opportunity.

People have come from places with zero opportunity, and have decided to pursue God's calling in their life, and come to the church, only to have their **marriages tested like never before** – some ending in divorce.

The reality is, spiritual victories are often followed by spiritual attacks.

Many of you in here are in the process of taking next steps in ministry. Many of you are moving forward. Many of you are in a new season of ministry, you've taken on a new role.

Understand that the enemy hates that.

- Every time you **make a decision** to move forward...
- Every time you **repent**...
- Every time you make a **commitment** to a **new** ministry...

... you can expect a spiritual attack.

Don't think that just because you serve God, **everything is going to be good**. Don't think just because you are serving God, that you are not going to have financial problems, or that your marriage is going to be perfect.

We need to know that **there is an enemy** who will do whatever he can to distract us and detour us from serving God.

Right before the preaching class the other week, a man came up to me and basically said he doesn't want to preach because every time he does, he gets hit. And he knows an attack will come, so he doesn't want to do it.

The reality is, we can be on the mountaintop, and then boom, we get diagnosed with cancer, or we get in a terrible car accident, or we lose our job.

Often times, spiritual victories are followed by spiritual attacks.

And if we're not careful, those things will cause us to quit. Those attacks will cause us to throw in the towel. Those attacks will cause us to not pursue ministry.

// BE ON GUARD //

We have to be on guard for this type of experience in the Christian life.

Practically speaking, I think we need to do 2 things:

1. We need to anticipate spiritual attacks, especially after spiritual victories.

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

1 Peter 4:12

One thing I have learned to do when I experience some spiritual victory is be on the lookout for spiritual attacks.

Seriously, I expect them. I know they are coming.

And I know the devil is often going to try to stir things up through my marriage. So I'm on the lookout. I don't allow things to bother me as easily. I try to be extra patient.

2. We need to persevere through the spiritual attacks when they come.

⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58

We need to be steadfast, we need to be immovable. We need to keep going. We can't let these attacks tear us down. We can't let the enemy keep getting cheap victories.

We can do this by staying grounded in our understanding of God.

Think right thoughts.

To be steadfast and unmovable is to be spiritually grounded. A steadfast person knows what he believes and cannot be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (Ephesians 4:14).

- We need to know that God is **good**.
- We need to know that God is **in control**.
- We need to know that God **has a plan**.
- We need to know that God is **bigger** than our struggle.
- We need to know that God will never put us in a situation we cannot handle.
- We need to know that God will always make a way for us to escape and overcome temptation.

We need to stand on the truth.

// CHALLENGE //

I want to challenge us this week.

This week, I want you to expect a spiritual attack.

Don't just go through the week expecting everything to be peaches and cream. But for this week, expect a spiritual attack. Be on the lookout.

Let's test and see if that helps us to be more discerning – especially when:

- Your boss gets on your case.
- Or your spouse gets on your nerves.
- Or you get cut off on the freeway.

// CONCLUSION //

Imagine how many **headaches** and **heartaches** we can avoid if we **anticipated** spiritual attacks, especially after mountaintop experiences.

Imagine how many **fights** we could avoid with our **spouse** if we were more **discerning** about spiritual attacks.

Imagine how much **trouble** we could avoid if we were **on guard** against spiritual attacks, especially when we've just experienced a spiritual victory.

Imagine **where we could be** spiritually a year from now, if we remain **steadfast** and not allow these spiritual attacks to knock us down.

Imagine if everyone in this room were **on guard** against spiritual attacks. Imagine the **unity** there would be. Imagine the **joy** there would be. Imagine how much **more friendly** everyone would be. Imagine how much **more dedicated** everyone would be. Imagine how much **more effective** everyone would be.

Let's start that today.