

2026 ALL-AGE TALK, 1 KINGS 18:41-46

'I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE'...

We played a game of 'I-Spy' this morning, based on the story of the Prophet Elijah & his servant on Mount Carmel. Anyone on the top of Mount Carmel can see for many miles across the Mediterranean Sea. An ideal location for a birds-eye view of everything around. More than that. This is the best place to *see into the future*. Yes, I know this sounds unlikely. But, from the top of Mount Carmel, you can indeed see the in-coming weather, carried on the westerly wind. That's why Elijah was there, because he wanted to see what was coming. He believed his servant would soon see a cloud. He was there because he trusted that God would hear his prayers. Elijah was praying for rain, of course.

Not sure this would be the main prayer on *our* lips at the beginning of 2026... I'm sure we would prefer to pray for more sunshine, like today. However, just this week my BBC news app was saying that Anglia Water has announced that we do need more rain to fill up some of our reservoirs for the coming year. You see, last year's spring & summer were the driest since records began, over 125 years ago... Without more rain than usual this winter & spring, come the summer, parts of the UK could be facing a significant water shortage...

So you see, that's one way there is some similarity between today & the days of Elijah... Israel was going through an environmental disaster, a bit like us today. To explain Israel's situation, we need to begin with the beginning of the story of the Prophet Elijah. Three years before Mount Carmel, Elijah had burst onto the scene, out of nowhere – or from Gilead, across the Jordan river to be more precise... Elijah had declared, to King Ahab & all of Israel, in the name of the LORD, that there would be no rain, until he said different !... This seems, at first glance, to be a very arrogant & uncaring announcement. Both Elijah *and* God who sent this prophet, must have known how difficult this would make the lives of all the people. Smaller harvests or no harvests at all - for three years. Poor people especially, would be on starvation rations for very long periods.

This announcement was a warning to King Ahab & all of Israel to change direction... You see, the King of Israel & all the people had turned their backs on the true God. The God of the covenant, who led them out of slavery, into the promised land. They were now worshipping Baal. One of many gods of

Israel's neighbours. How ridiculous!. To turn their backs on the One God who had promised to care for them & had fulfilled these promises - for centuries...

At the end of 3 years of awful drought for God's people, God told Elijah to go & make another announcement to King Ahab. There was going to be a big showdown between the true God & the many false prophets of Baal, on the top of Mount Carmel. To cut a long story short, the false prophets were completely humiliated. The God of Israel very clearly answered Elijah's prayers - & God's people committed themselves to worshipping their true God once again.

This was when Elijah took his stand on Mount Carmel & prayed for rain. He bowed down before the LORD, in an attitude of humility, with his head between his knees, and he prayed. And he kept praying. He sent his servant off to look out across the sea. Again & again. He didn't tell the servant what he was looking for. He just told him to go & look. Six times the servant went to look – and what did he see? Absolutely nothing!... The servant might have begun to think this was a fool's errand. After about three trips, he might have stopped really looking, because there seemed like nothing to see. After the 5th trip, he might have thought: 'I'll save myself the bother & won't go to look, but just tell my master "there's nothing there"'. ... But no, the servant kept going to look. And on the 7th time of obeying his master, he saw a tiny cloud, small as a man's fist, in the far distance, over the sea.

So what? you might think... But that was enough for Elijah. He knew the torrential rains he had prayed for were coming. So, Elijah told King Ahab to return by chariot, as fast as possible, to his palace in Jezreel. He himself, under the power of the LORD, ran all the way back to Jezreel. (This was a distance of around a modern marathon, but over some very rough terrain...!).

At the start of 2026, we can learn a lot from Elijah & his obedient servant. We should encourage each other to persevere in prayer. To keep looking to God. To keep believing that God will answer our prayers, no matter how impossible they might seem. Let us keep following God. Keep listening to God's word to us. Despite there being, at times, little by way of encouragements for us.

Like Israel in Elijah's day, we know all about people turning away from God. We know about people not listening to God. And in our shame, we know that this has sometimes been true of ourselves. We know about years of drought & spiritual dryness. Years when our churches have declined - both in numbers &

in our desire to seek God. But I believe I can declare this today, at the start of 2026 in the name of the LORD: ...' ***the rains are coming... get ready, cos they are coming...*** ' Alleluia!

This might be no more than a 'small cloud' in the grand scheme of things. But, thanks be to God, last year we baptised 5 people at Carey. And at the beginning of this NY, there are now 8 people asking about either baptism or membership. This is partly because Carey obeyed God & launched an Alpha course last year.

... I believe God is saying to us in 2026: 'the time is now' - to pray & look & believe for an end to the drought. To pray for a year of a plentiful harvest. To keep praying & keep believing for more, in the coming years! This is God's doing. The 'quiet revival' we've been hearing about. This is God's doing. And I believe it is just the start of something... Are we ready to pray... to listen... to look... to go – in God's name, for the sake of the people of this town, this nation, this world...?

At the start of 2026, God calls us to get a good view on our lives. A vantage point to look back on the previous year – and to begin to try to look forward into the future. What are you praying for? And what do you see? Do you have a heart for God ?... Do you have a heart for the people around you, who are starving? ... Do you have a heart for God's creation, which is parched & dry? This people, this creation, are all in need of God, in need of a new start! How will this world hear & see the good news, unless we tell them & show them?

We are called this year to follow Jesus. Let us, in 2026, encourage others to follow Jesus too. Thanks be to God for the good news of Jesus!... God will answer our prayers... The rains are coming. The water of life. This will become a spring of fresh water within us, welling up to eternal life.... God will send us what we most need, today & in the future. What we most need – all of us – is simple: we need God! As Jesus put it:

"So I say to you: 'ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you...' If you, though you are sinful, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask...". Alleluia!