

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Can you remember a time when you had to choose between doing what God would want and doing something that seemed more fun or popular? What made you decide that way, and what happened as a result?
- 2 Are there parts of your life where it's hard to pick what God wants over what everyone else is doing? How can you be a part of the world without letting its ideas and behaviors take over?
- 3 Think about how things would be different if you always picked God's way instead of doing what everyone else does. How might your relationships, choices, and how you act change? What small steps can you take today to get closer to truly following God?

WE DO LIFE TOGETHER!



SCAN QR

If you haven't been involved in a LIFE Group yet, send us a message us thru Fb, and we will get you connected to a small group.

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SUNDAY WORD

08 • 27 • 2023

ELIJAH

PART 4 COURAGE TO TAKE
A STAND

ELIJAH's name is a prophetic name that would one day change the lives of the people of Israel. It means "The Lord is My God". Let's look back at his story. One day without warning, he appeared before King Ahab. Elijah said to the king in 1 Kings 17:1, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word (NIV)."

In the meantime, in the nation of Israel, the famine set in. Just as Elijah had prophesied, for more than three years, there had been no rain. The ground turned brown and began to crack. The creeks dried up, and the brooks disappeared. All across the land, the crops and animals were dying. It was in this situation that God tapped Elijah and said, "Go see Ahab again."

1 Kings 18:16b-19 - "16 ...Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. 19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." (NIV)

On the appointed day they met on top of Mt. Carmel. 1 Kings 18:20-21 - "20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." (NIV)

The most important part comes in the next sentence. "But the people said nothing." Of all the things that plague modern Christianity, perhaps this is the greatest: spiritual indecision or spiritual juggling. It is unfortunate that Christians don't know what they BELIEVE IN and what they should STAND ON. We mix feng shui with Christianity. We blend horoscopes with Christian beliefs. We believe superstitious beliefs of our elders and claim that we're believers of Jesus. We want to please God and yet we're ok with abortion, transgenderism, racism, and discrimination. Christians are confused. They don't know which team they're on. We can't decide who we're going to play for. And that's why we struggle about which uniform we're going to put on in the morning.

Note the little word "if." The word "if" means you have to make up your mind. There is a time to think and there is a time to decide. The Lord is God. Is He or isn't He? He made it practical and personal. He did not say if the Lord is God, buy a book and think about it. He said if the Lord is God, get on His team and follow Him. And if Baal is god, fine, then get on his team and follow him. But stop sitting on the fence. You have to decide sooner or later.

850 to 1

Elijah proposed a simple experiment so the people would know which God was the true God. 1 Kings 18:22-24 - "22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God." (NIV)

The one who answers by fire, he is God. We could use more of that courage today. Christians need less talk and more action. There comes a time when talk is cheap. The people of Israel were swaying between two opinions. "We think maybe the God of Israel is God. Or maybe Baal is God. Maybe we can mix the two somehow." A little of this, a little of that. Elijah said, no, the time has now come to make up your mind.

The story itself is very simple. The prophets of Baal cut up a bull and laid the pieces on the wood, on one condition. They were not allowed to set it on fire. Elijah said, "Ask Baal to light the fire for you." He told the prophets of Baal and Asherah to do whatever they thought they needed to do in order to entice Baal to send fire from heaven. It's their god Ba'al who should set it on fire. That's the ultimate test.

1 Kings 18:26-29 - "26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. 27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention." (NIV)

When Elijah suggests that perhaps Baal is busy, he uses a Hebrew word that has a variety of meanings. Some say that the word means that he's gone off hunting or something. Others said it means to go to the bathroom. That's an insult if you think about it. Elijah is a not a refined, city man. He's a mountain man. So, he's not afraid of embarrassing people. He'll say anything that comes to mind.

In desperation, the prophets of Baal took knives and swords and began cutting themselves as a kind of blood sacrifice to their false god. This shows how desperate they were. But the heavens were silent. And Baal had failed big time. Baal was a big failure.

THE SOAKING SACRIFICE

Verse 30 is perhaps the most important verse in the chapter. 1 Kings 18:30 - "Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down (NIV)." Taking twelve stones, one for each of the

twelve tribes, he rebuilt the altar of the Lord. This was a symbolic sign that the nation would now return to its true spiritual heritage. The timing is also significant. Elijah rebuilt the altar late in the afternoon, about the time of the evening sacrifice. This was the time God had appointed, but Israel had completely forgotten about it.

1 Kings 18:33-35 - "33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." 34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench." (NIV)

By doing these radical things at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah was saying, "Our God is a covenant God. If we come back to Him according to His Word, He will not turn us away." If we come back to Him on His terms in the right way at the right time, He will come through for us. God is a God who will keep His promises. Though the people had forgotten, God still was ready to keep His promise.

So at the hour of sacrifice, everything was ready. But they needed a miracle. 1 Kings 18:36-37 - "36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." (NIV)

On one side you have 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, and you have eight, nine, ten hours of screaming and shouting and cutting themselves, and you have all their prayers to their fake god. You have all that religiosity. And over here you have one man, Elijah, God's representative. When he prays, he uses only 24 words in English. He prays for three things: 1. Answer me, Lord, answer me; 2. so these people will know that you, Lord, are God; 3. and that you are turning their hearts back again." Elijah's only concern was for God, His word, His work, His glory, and God's people. No screaming. No ritual. No cutting themselves. It was simple and dignified.

The point of this whole story is really not about Elijah. And the point of the story is really not about the people, not about Ahab and the prophets of Baal. This is a story about God. Elijah's just the instrument through whom God works an incredible miracle. God can use His people as His instruments to deliver a miracle but people can never be the source of miracle.

What is it that keeps you from being a whole-hearted follower of Jesus Christ? Is it your social life? Many young people and many singles struggle at precisely this point. You want to be where the action is, and you fear that if you follow Jesus, you'll miss out on the action of life. A young woman wrote describing her own spiritual dilemma. For years she had struggled with being "two different people"—one person at church and another person during the week. You can't go out to have drinks with friends, and then turn around and rely on church to make you feel whole again. You can't combine two lifestyles - worldly and godly. You have to choose one, and the choice is obvious.

There are a lot of "gods" fighting for control of our lives. Whether it is money, pride, success and so on, or the gods of other religions that claim to compliment Jesus, we cannot allow any area of our life to be surrendered to another "god". We must cut down our Baals and follow Jesus alone. When we stand before our Creator, we will be judged based on what we did with Jesus, and we will get no credit for just sampling Him. time is running out. Jesus is soon coming. God demands a decision. God speaks to us in our hearts and confronts us with the need to repent and believe.