

What was the purpose of this extravagant sacrifice? What was God seeking from the people?

When Elijah poured gallons of water on the altar he was demonstrating two things; 1) he held nothing back and was willing to pour out what was most precious (i.e. water in a drought) trusting God to be His provider of living water, and 2) that God could do the impossible even if it meant burning a water-soaked sacrifice.

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!" - 1 Kings 18:38-39 NIV

The people had realized the truth when God's power swept over the altar and incinerated not only the bull but everything down to the rock, soil and water. They immediately acknowledged that the Lord is God and the slaughtered the prophets of Baal. It was at this point that a cloud arose in the distance and the rain returned to the land.

The prophets of Baal spent sunrise to sunset petitioning an impotent god. But in a flash, in response to Elijah's prayer, Yahweh demonstrated He alone was the one true God of Israel. And He wanted them to turn their hearts back to Him. And with the return of the people's faith, God restored the rains to the land.

WRAP-UP

After King Solomon's death, Israel split into two kingdoms, and the Northern Kingdom, led by King Ahab and Jezebel, turned from worshiping the Lord to following Baal, believing this false god could provide prosperity and security. Through Elijah's bold challenge on Mount Carmel, God demonstrated that He alone is the one true God, while Obadiah's story reminds us that faithfulness often requires courage even when we are afraid. Together, their stories challenge us to consider where we place our trust, reminding us that we cannot serve two masters or divide our devotion between God and the false promises of success, comfort, power, or anything else that competes for our hearts. Our hope is in Jesus alone.

MEMORY VERSE

13 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." - Luke 16:13 NIV

Challenge – *Take a personal inventory of where you've relied on other things rather than trusting God. For safety, security, purpose, value. Don't let false gods promise what they can't deliver and miss God's provision for you.*

The Oldies- Week 7 Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

INTRODUCTION

After King Solomon died, Israel was split into the Southern Kingdom (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) which remained in Jerusalem, and the Northern Kingdom comprised of the remaining 10 tribes. The Northern Kingdom was ruled by a succession of evil and unfaithful kings who led the people into sin and idolatry. One of the worst was Ahab who married Jezebel and adopted her worship of Baal. But the Lord was not willing to surrender His people to false gods and so He sent His prophet Elijah to demonstrate His power and authority by declaring a drought. Baal was believed to rule over rain, sun and fertility. But after a years-long drought and ensuing famine God directed Elijah to return and challenge Baal's prophets to a showdown that would clearly demonstrate His power and sovereignty.

Ice Breaker

Have you lived in California during any of its droughts (e.g. 1976-77, 1987-92, 2007-09, and 2012-16) If so, what do you remember about how it impacted your daily life?

Key Passage

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." But the people said nothing. - 1 Kings 18:21 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Ahab Leads the People Astray

30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. 31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. 32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. - 1 Kings 16:30-33 NIV

The kings of the Northern Kingdom were notorious, and Ahab was the worst of his time. Together with his Phoenician queen, Jezebel, Ahab led the people to worship Baal, a Phoenician and Canaanite deity. Baal was believed to control the weather, crops and livestock. In an agrarian culture, this equated to wealth.

The worship of Baal was “advertised” as the Israelites’ path to prosperity. The king was promoting this “god”, and the people had a choice to make. What would they have to sacrifice or trade-off if they were going to accept Baal as their god? How might God’s people be similarly drawn to false gods in our culture?

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "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." 2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: 3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." 5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. - 1 Kings 17:1-6 NIV

Elijah had “thrown down the gauntlet” when he declared a drought. Would Baal be able to control the weather and bring bountiful crops if Yahweh called for a drought? Elijah was faithful in delivering God’s message to Ahab, and if he had stayed in the city, he would have suffered the effects of the drought. But God knew Ahab would search for Elijah once the drought was evident and so God was Elijah’s protection and provision as he hid him away from Ahab’s wrath.

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. - Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

If we challenge the “false gods” of this world and refuse to walk “their broad path” referred to in Matthew 7, what ways might we suffer- What are some examples of following the narrow road rather than the broad path today?

2. Obadiah- Faithfulness and Fear

2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, 3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. 4 While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) . - 1 Kings 18:2-4 NIV

Even though he held the position of palace administrator, Obadiah remained a devout believer in God. What had he done as Jezebel threatened God’s prophets? Just as God used the ravens to bring food to Elijah, He used Obadiah to bring food and water to the hidden prophets. This was not a choice he made lightly. What do you think it took for Obadiah to provide food and water to the prophets during the 3 years of drought and famine? What should have been a cause for celebration became a time of fear when Elijah directed Obadiah to tell Ahab that he had returned. Obadiah had seen

God’s faithfulness, but he still struggled to overcome his fears in doing what God was calling him to do. We will face similar fears in our lifetime, because

7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" 8 "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.' " ... 12 I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth. 13 Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. 14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

- 1 Kings 18: 7-8, 12-14 NIV

God grows our faith as he challenges us to follow Him. But as we remember that God has been faithful to us, we will find the courage trust that He will continue to be faithful in the difficult seasons of our lives.

3. The Contest

When Elijah confronted King Ahab, he charged him with abandoning the Lord to follow the Baals. So, Elijah challenged 850 false prophets to meet him in front of all the people on Mt. Carmel. The worship of pagan deities often was performed in the highest places, so meeting on Mt. Carmel gave “team Baal” the home field advantage as well as 850 to 1 odds.

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." But the people said nothing. - 1 Kings 18:21 NIV

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The purpose of this contest was to demonstrate a clear difference between Yahweh whom the people had abandoned and Baal who was in fact powerless. Are there areas in your life where you feel tempted to put your faith in things that compete for your devotion while trying to follow Jesus? What would it take to surrender them completely to God?

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." - 1 Kings 18:36-37 NIV

Back in the Temple in Jerusalem, it was time for the evening sacrifice, and in the Northern Kingdom Elijah had built an altar with 12 stones to represent the tribes of Isarel where he placed a bull and soaked it with gallons of precious water as he prayed to God. How did he identify God?