

SUNDAY SCHOOL

H

A. P. 06-03-2018

HIGHLIGHT: 1 Kings 18:20-39

²⁰So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. ²¹Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.

²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only remaining prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. ²³Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The God who answers with fire, He is God."

All the people answered, "That sounds good."

²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don't light the fire."

²⁶So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

²⁷At noon Elijah mocked them. He said, "Shout loudly, for he's a god! Maybe he's thinking it over; maybe he has wandered away; or maybe he's on the road. Perhaps he's sleeping and will wake up!" ²⁸They shouted loudly, and cut themselves with knives and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them.

²⁹All afternoon they kept on raving until the offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was

no sound; no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near me." So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the Lord's altar that had been torn down: ³¹Elijah took 12 stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel will be your name"—³²and he built an altar with the stones in the name of Yahweh. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. ³³Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "A second time!" and they did it a second time. And then he said, "A third time!" and they did it a third time. ³⁵So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water.

³⁶At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet approached the altar and said, "Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that at Your word I have done all these things. ³⁷Answer me, Lord! Answer me so that this people will know that You, Yahweh, are God and that You have turned their hearts back."

³⁸Then Yahweh's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, "Yahweh, He is God! Yahweh, He is God!"



EXPLAIN

In this passage, the prophet Elijah confronts worshippers of Baal at Mt. Carmel, but the real clash is between God and evil. In the same way that God's conflict with the power of Egypt freed the Israelites from their physical bondage in Moses' day, it could be argued that this power struggle is the one that freed them from their spiritual bondage in Elijah's day. Today, we find ourselves still having to answer Elijah's challenge: we must get off of the fence and decide whom we will follow. Will we follow the myriad gods given to us by the world or by the God who answers with fire?

- vv.20-29 Elijah's challenge to the people echoes Joshua's: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." Similarly, the contest that he proposes draws from the scriptural precedent that Aaron established in Leviticus 9: when the Lord came as a consuming fire to devour the offering on the altar. He knew that God was who He said He was, and that He would continue to be forever.
- v.30 It is interesting that Elijah does not use an altar that is already built, because this broken altar represents the broken spiritual state of the Israelites. By rebuilding it with twelve stones (representing the twelve tribes of Israel), he reminds the people both whose they are and whose land they are on.
- v.36 When Elijah invokes the God of "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," he makes an interesting substitution. We usually see Yahweh as the God of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." By replacing "Israel" for "Jacob," Elijah reminds the people of who Jacob became after clinging to Yahweh. In the same way, they must abandon Baal and return to the God of their covenant.
- vv.36-37 Elijah's prayer is intentionally and sharply contrasted with the invocation of the prophets of Baal in verses 26 through 29. One commentator named G.E. Saint-Laurant wrote, "The biblical author has deliberately emphasized those dimensions of the story which most sharply contrast the powerful dominion of Yahweh with the impotence of Baal."

APPLY

1. What stuck out to you or challenged you in what you read in the text?
2. Elijah offers a choice: Israel either had to choose God or Baal, but they had to choose one. Where do we see we have to make the choice between God and culture today?
3. When does something become a "Baal"? Why is it impossible to serve two masters? Who or what are our Baals today?
4. What is the difference between Elijah's attitude in verses 27-28 and the priests' in verses 26-29? What does a life totally surrendered to God look like?



RESPOND

Write out a response to the following question in the space below.

5. If the people in your life were polled based on how you live, whom would they say you serve? Are your actions and attitudes revealing a life dedicated to serving God or this world?

