

**READ:** I Kings 18:17-39 (NIV)

When [Ahab] saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "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. 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." So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

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. Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 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. 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." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." 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. 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." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 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.

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. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 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." "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

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. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." 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. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"

ENTER THE STORY:

The first commandment that God gave the Israelites was "You shall have no other gods before me." The second commandment had a similar idea... "You shall not make for yourself a carved image...you shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God." (Exodus 20:3-5)

The nation of Israel was in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, and his rules were clear, but there was just one problem, Israel was never any good at being faithful to Yahweh. They were tempted by everything. If it sparkled and shimmered and offered something better, they chased after it and worshiped it with their whole heart.

Even King Solomon got swept away in the worship of false gods, and as a consequence for his sin, God took the once united kingdom of Israel and divided it into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was called "Israel" and the southern kingdom was called "Judah." There were 19 kings in total throughout the history of the northern kingdom.

Can you guess how many of the 19 kings in the northern kingdom remained faithful to God and led their people to worship ONLY him? ZERO!

Every single king led Israel further and further into idolatry and further and further away from the heart of Yahweh.

In our story today, King Ahab is reigning. He was a wicked and cruel king, with an even more wicked wife, Jezebel. They worshiped many different false gods, and encouraged the people of Israel to do the same. In fact, there were 450 prophets of a false god called "Baal," and 400 prophets to a different false god called "Asherah." These false prophets lived in the palace and even ate at the king's table. Can you image how angry that made God?

Elijah was one of God's prophets, sent to warn King Ahab what would happen if he didn't stop worshipping false gods.

In fact, in order to prove to the people, once and for all, that God was the only true God, Elijah arranged a battle of the gods. Baal vs Yahweh. Whichever god showed up with fire to burn up the animal sacrifice, was the ONE true God.

When it was time for Baal to show up with fire, what do you think happened? NOTHING!

That is because Baal is NOT real, he is a pretend god and a figment of their imagination.

When it was Elijah's turn, he didn't want there to be any doubt who the real God was, so he built a twelve stone altar to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and had them pour twelve buckets of water on the wood until it was completely soaked.

Have you ever tried to light wet wood on fire? It's IMPOSSIBLE, isn't it? But what have we learned about God over the past few days? He is the God who does IMPOSSIBLE things! More than that... impossible things are easy for God!

So Elijah prayed and asked God to reveal himself, and he did! Holy fire from heaven rained down on the altar and burned up everything... the offering, the wood, the stones, the dust on the ground, and ALL of the water in the trench!

When the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

They were convinced, and they believed, at least for a while. Sadly, their faithfulness wouldn't last. It wouldn't be long before Israel would turn away from Yahweh again, and look to other gods to give them what they thought they needed most.

Our idols look a little different today, but our hearts chase after them just the same. It might be needing to have the newest toy or game, or it might be needing to be liked by others, or needing to be seen as "pretty" or "handsome." These desires can quickly consume our thoughts and lead us to worship them if we aren't careful.

This Christmas season, let's remind ourselves of the only thing in life worth worshipping and waiting for... Jesus. Let's chant together, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God," because we know that the other things of this world can't bring us true happiness. He alone can give us exactly what we need, so let's look to him to fill our hearts with joy as we look forward to celebrating his arrival as our Promised Messiah!!

PRAY: Heavenly Father, forgive us when our hearts wander away from you and fall in love with the things of this world. Thank you for showing yourself to us when we doubt you, Lord. Remind us this Christmas season of the ONLY gift worth waiting for! Amen.