



READ: I Kings 18:17-26, 30-31, 36-39 (NIRV)

When [Ahab] saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you? You are always stirring up trouble in Israel." "I haven't made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have turned away from the LORD's commands. You have followed gods that are named Baal. Now send for people from all over Israel. Tell them to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the 450 prophets of the god named Baal. Also bring the 400 prophets of the female god named Asherah. All of them eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent that message all through Israel. He gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.

Elijah went there and stood in front of the people. He said, "How long will it take you to make up your minds? If the LORD is the one and only God, worship him. But if Baal is the one and only God, worship him." The people didn't say anything. Then Elijah said to them, "I'm the only one of the LORD's prophets left. But Baal has 450 prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves. Let them cut it into pieces. Then let them put it on the wood. But don't let them set fire to it. I'll prepare the other bull. I'll put it on the wood. But I won't set fire to it. Then you pray to your god. And I'll pray to the Lord. The god who answers by sending fire down is the one and only God." Then all the people said, "What you are saying is good."

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls. There are many of you. So prepare your bull first. Pray to your god. But don't light the fire." So they prepared the bull they had been given. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon. "Baal! Answer us!" they shouted. But there wasn't any reply. No one answered.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." So they went to him. Elijah got 12 stones...one for each tribe in the family line of Jacob...Elijah used the stones to build an altar to honor the LORD...When it was time to offer the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward. He prayed, "LORD, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Today let everyone know that you are God in Israel. Let them know I'm your servant. Let them know I've done all these things because you commanded me to. Answer me. Lord, answer me. Then these people will know that you are the one and only God. They'll know that you are turning their hearts back to you again." The fire of the LORD came down. It burned up the sacrifice. It burned up the wood and the stones and the soil. It even dried up the water in the ditch. All the people saw it. Then they fell down flat with their faces toward the ground. They cried out, "The LORD is the one and only God! The LORD is the one and only God!"

ENTER THE STORY:

God has always wanted his people to love him MORE than anything else in the whole wide world, but there was just one problem. His people, the Israelites, were not very good at this. They were pulled away by lots of different things. If it sparkled and shimmered and offered something better, they chased after it and worshiped it with their whole heart.

Elijah was a messenger for God, and he had a very hard job. He had to tell the king of Israel that God would punish him if he didn't change his bad behavior. This made the king very upset. But you see, this king worshiped a bunch of pretend, imaginary gods, and he encouraged the people of Israel to do the same. This made God very angry.

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

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

Now it was Yahweh's turn, and boy were the people in for a special show!

Elijah wanted to make sure there was NO doubt who the real god was, so he even had his helpers dump 12 buckets full of water on the wood and the altar. There was so much water that it made a little river that floated around the altar!

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* the water in the trench! When the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

They believed that God was the only true God, at least for a little while. Sadly, their faithfulness wouldn't last forever. It wouldn't be long before Israel would turn away from Yahweh again, and look to other pretend gods to give them what they thought they needed most.

This story happened a long, long time ago, but it is still hard for us today to love God MORE than anything else. Our hearts still chase after many other things.

If we are not careful, we will be tricked into hoping the things of this world will make us happy. Instead, this Christmas season, let's remind ourselves of the only thing in life worth waiting for...Jesus. 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.