



THE
WORD

SESSION SNAPSHOT

ARE YOU A FENCE WALKER OR FIRE CALLER?

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

1 Kings 18:20-39

GOSPEL FOCUS:

Matthew 6:24

TAKEAWAYS:

- Choose which side you will serve
- We need unity in our community of faith

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- 1 Kings 16:29-34; 17
- 1 Kings 18-19
- 1 Kings 21-22
- 2 Kings 2
- 2 Kings 5; 6:1-23

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

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?

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

- 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. The author of 1 Kings went out of their way to emphasize the ways in which this story highlights God's dominion over Baal's impotence. Elijah's prayer echoes and elaborates on the prayer that Baal's prophets prayed so briefly in verse 26, demonstrating how intimately he knew the God he was praying to.

STUDY THE WORD

We are all offered choices every day, whether we know it or not. They can be simple: which route should I take to work? They can be a little bit heavier: how should I respond to this difficult situation?

What tends to be the most difficult decision of your day?

OUT LOUD, READ 1 KINGS 18:20-24

Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel is filled with swagger and drama. As you read this account, pay attention to the absolute confidence with which Elijah conducts himself.

Look at verse 21 again. Where do we see this kind of choice in our lives today?

Do you think it is true that you can either follow God or follow something else--but you can't do both? Why do you think so?

The prophets of Baal wanted to have it both ways. They wanted to be able to have an understanding of the things of the Lord (see v.18) but also continue to serve a master who wasn't Him. If the Lord is the Lord of our lives, we can't claim to also follow someone else; at some point we will have to do as Elijah challenged these prophets to do: make a decision.

When does something in our lives become a "baal," or a false god?

Why is it impossible to serve two masters?

What are some of the things that you put before the Lord in your life? See if you can figure out the point when something crosses the line from being a hobby to being an idol. Some examples of signs that something has become an idol could be:

- It causes you to disobey God.
- It gives you greater joy than Christ does.
- It is what you spend the majority of your time/money on.
- It is what you fear losing the most.
- It is what you look to for heart-rejuvenation.

OUT LOUD, READ 1 KINGS 18:25-29

Notice as you read how Elijah doesn't even pay lip service to Baal's power. Instead, at every turn, he mocks the false god, because he already knows which God holds all of the power.

The prophets' rituals had all of the markings of something legitimate: chanting, songs, and big showy displays of reverence. But it ultimately turned up empty.

What are ways that the world or your culture promises to fulfill you?

How do those things end up being ultimately unfulfilling?

Often, we're sold the lie that we need more: more money, more possessions, more friends, more confidence. But these things end up looking a lot like Baal's prophets, full of sound and promises and expectations, but ultimately unsatisfying.

Contrast the prophets' rituals with what Elijah does next:

OUT LOUD, READ 1 KINGS 18:30-39

Notice as you read the contrast between what Elijah does and what the prophets of Baal did.

What differences do you see between how Elijah conducted himself and how the prophets of Baal did?

How have you seen the Lord prove that He is endlessly more powerful than anything the world can offer us?

What do you think it looks like to live a life devoted to this God?

When the priests were trying to invoke Baal to start the fire, they were being loud, rambunctious, and ridiculous. They resorted to a number of ancient rituals, almost like they were throwing all of their darts against a wall to see what stuck. They were frantic, sure, but more than that, they were useless. In contrast, Elijah, who had been sarcastic and mocking of the priests just hours before, gets straight down to business. He is reasoned, peaceful, and offers a simple, quiet prayer with no overly ceremonious gestures. When your life is totally surrendered to God, the things you do and the way you do them is completely different than those around you.

What was the people's response to what happened after Elijah prayed?

How do you think believers' lives could inspire a similar response?

APPLY THE WORD

Just like with Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel, there are people watching us as we tackle the question Elijah posed at the beginning: "Which God will you serve?" It may even be that they've never seen somebody sold out and wholly devoted to the Lord. You might be the first and only example of that they've ever seen.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

If the people in your life were polled based on how you live, whom would they say you serve?

Are your actions and attitudes those of someone dedicated to serving the Lord or are they those of someone who, like the prophets, wavers between opinions?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Jonah 1-2***
- ***Jonah 3-4***
- ***Hosea 1-3***
- ***Amos 1:1; 9***
- ***Joel 1-3***