

1 Kings 18:16-40

January 22, 2023



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you consider yourself decisive or indecisive in each of the following situations? Choosing a restaurant for dinner; deciding whether you have a crush on someone; choosing classes; figuring out what you're going to do on a Friday night; writing an Instagram caption.

What about with God? Are you decisive or indecisive about trusting Him? Why?

Is it okay to be indecisive about trusting God? Explain.

What other options are you tempted to choose instead of God each day?

At the time of 1 Kings 18, the Israelites had a choice to make. Rather than choosing to serve God or Baal, they were indecisive. Some Israelites may have worshiped God as Israel's traditional God and may have worshiped Baal too, believing he would send the rains on time so the harvest would be good. Elijah told the Israelites they had to choose. God does not tolerate half-hearted or divided loyalty and service. When faced with the choice, the people said nothing. Some may have been content in their commitment to both God and Baal. Yet, to fail to choose is to reject God. God requires our full devotion and is completely worthy of it.

DISCUSSION

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 18:16-40.

What was Elijah's charge against the people? Why did the people need to decide between the Lord or Baal?

Why didn't the people say anything in response to Elijah (see v. 21)? What attitudes could account for their silence?

Read Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13. Have you ever tried to serve two masters? How can you know if you're serving two masters or God alone?

What message did God send the people that day on Mount Carmel?

What are some examples of situations that may require you to stand for the Lord against opposition?

What prepares you to take a courageous stand?

What promises are given to believers?

What stands out to you about Elijah's prayer?

Look again at verse 39. What stands out to you about the people's response to Elijah's miracle? What did they affirm about God? What had changed between this verse and verse 21?

Think back on your spiritual journey. What is a moment that stands out when you confidently lived like you believe, "The Lord, he is God" (v. 39)?

APPLICATION

What is your biggest struggle in submitting yourself fully to God in faith?

What are some ways we can keep our hearts from drifting toward other "gods"?

How does Elijah's story in 1 Kings 18 challenge your prayer life?

PRAYER

Thank God for His wisdom and strength when we are facing overwhelming odds in this world. Ask Him to help you grow so that your prayers would be true prayers of faith, depending on Him to do what only He can.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Elijah.

January 29, 2023 --- 1 Kings 18:41-46

COMMENTARY

16-19. When the two men meet, Ahab calls Elijah the “destroyer of Israel,” blaming the drought on him, but he does not attempt immediately to have him killed. Elijah returns the accusation, stating fearlessly that Ahab’s family’s commitment to Baal has forced Yahweh to withhold rain, thus proving the Lord’s power over the storm god. Now Elijah suggests a contest to determine who benefits Israel and who troubles the land. The site will be Mount Carmel, a place that may have long held significance for both worshipers of Yahweh and adherents of Baalism. What better place to decide who is God, what prophets tell the truth, and what leaders benefit or harm the people?

20-21. Ahab apparently is satisfied with the odds and expects this to be an excellent way to rid himself of this troublesome prophet and separatistic Yahwism at the same time. So Ahab obliges Elijah by sending for the people and the prophets. They wait to see who will win and who can help them the most. Will it be Baal or Yahweh? The prophet challenges the people to stop limping between two opinions—to decide who is God and then act on that decision. The people are noncommittal at best. They “limp” along without conviction, wanting to follow halfheartedly one god and then the other.

22-25. Only Elijah and, ironically, the prophets of Baal have any conviction. Both Elijah and his counterparts believe their god to be the solution to Israel’s problems. Elijah is supremely confident that there is no god but Yahweh. His experiences in Phoenicia have confirmed to him this truth. Despite what some scholars argue, Elijah does not accept the existence of many gods, thinking only that Yahweh is the strongest. Elijah wants to eliminate Baal from consideration whenever Israel decides theological matters. To achieve this goal Elijah suggests a contest. He says that a sacrifice should be offered and that the real God must come take it by fire. The people like this contest, and the text does not indicate the Baalists object at all. Again, at least the prophets of Baal do not lack conviction. As storm god, Baal was thought to be responsible for lightning as well as rain, it ought to have been an easy contest.

26-29. Baal’s prophets attempt to rouse him from the dead. They shout, but no one responds. Next, they “dance” or “limp” around the altar, again trying to get the god’s attention. This ritual dance also gets no response. At noon Elijah begins to taunt them, suggesting Baal is preoccupied in some manner. Desperate now, their authority at stake, the Baalists cut themselves and practice frenzied prophesying, not unlike self-hypnosis. Though they try for hours, the text says as explicitly as it can that their god is unable to answer because he is not real.

30-40. Very dramatically, Elijah rebuilds the altar now damaged by the frantic Baalistic rites. He then soaks it with water to remove any doubt about the

miracle that will soon occur. When he prays for the fire to fall, he asks the Lord to remind the people that he is the covenant God of Israel. Without Yahweh there would be no Israel. Elijah also prays that he will be vindicated as the prophet of the covenant God. Finally, he asks that the people know Yahweh is God and that they have the opportunity to repent at once. This prayer incorporates concern, then, for God's reputation, the validity of the prophet's work, and for the people's well-being. Fire falls without delay. It consumes the altar and the sacrifice. In the immediacy of the moment, with fear in their hearts, the people confess, "Yahweh, He is God!" They see no validity in any of Baal's claims at this point and have become, temporarily at least, strict Yahwistic monotheists. Thus, Elijah has taken the first step in showing the people who is God. The evil prophets were executed.