

“Choose Your ‘God’”

Ընտրէ՛ Աստուածդ

1 Kings 18

Here in the Central Valley, we often see gambling advertisements around. It really bothered me to see that gambling was an issue in Armenia too. It is a big business, and the losers are the people. I asked my nephew, “Why is gambling such a big business here?” He said, “People are looking for hope. They’re thinking, ‘What if I win big?’” They are looking for hope in wrong places.

We live in a world where it is commonly believed that the ends justify the means. Machiavelli’s ideology is not too far from our world.

We live in a **materialistic** world where values are upside down.

And today’s message is similar. Israel was going **through a severe famine and drought**. (Like California about drought)

The Northern ruler of Israel, **King Ahab** married a woman from **Sidon** called **Jezebel**. She was a Baal worshiper, and Baal was the god of fertility.

Jezebel brought with her the prophets of Baal (450) and Asherah.(400)

Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. ³¹ He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³² He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. (1 King 16:30-33 NIV11)

To please his beloved wife, King Ahab even built a house and an alter for Baal.

Not only a temple for Baal, but “ Ahab also made an Asherah pole.” (1King 16:33)

Israel had to choose between two gods: the God Yahweh, the “I AM”,

the One who liberated them from Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land, the One who promised them to protect them,

the One who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

OR the god of the Canaanites, Baal, the god of rain and fertility.

Elijah, the prophet of God. Elijah was **facing the Israelites** who rejected Yahweh; he is facing **king Ahab** who embraced Jezebel and her gods, and 850 false prophets (450 Baal prophets, and 400 Asherah prophets); **Elijah was one prophet against all....**

This is a tough situation. Imagine you are in a country where everyone else worships other gods, and you alone worship the God "I AM". How would you feel if you were alone in your Christian faith at school, at the college, at the sports club? By the way, many of us feel that way. Whom do you choose?

What was going on?

Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD Yahweh.

We see a new name, **Obadiah**. Meaning: "servant or slave of Yahweh" or "worshiper of Yahweh."

The Word of God says about him this:

Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. (1 King 18:2 NIV11)

Obadiah took one hundred prophets and hid them. (1 Kings 18:3-4)

We find a second man who believed in the Lord God "I AM." **Obadiah** was from the **King's household**.

He was from the inside of the governing house. He was given a mission by King Ahab to search for water and grass for the cattle.

Obadiah serves the Lord from inside the palace, while Elijah serves the Lord from the outside.

God has His faithful servants everywhere.

This is very important for me to articulate to you, to my congregation. Not all of us are called to full time ministry. But all of us are called **to be ambassadors of Christ** all the time, at any location, "inside and outside."

We all have a unique way, a talent, a means to offer to God. Each of us should never underestimate our role in the Kingdom of God. Whether "inside or outside" we have an important role.

Next, we see the Prophet **Elijah who finds Obadiah** and tells him to inform King **Ahab** that he wants to meet him.

Elijah's life was in danger. King Ahab had been searching for Elijah for three years in order to kill him. Now God gave Elijah the "green light" to move on and meet the King.

-Obadiah has to trust Elijah.

If Obadiah informed the king about Elijah, and Elijah did not show up, the king would kill him. There is a lengthy speech here (1Kings 18:9-14). I think Elijah is calling on Obadiah to move **to a higher level of commitment to the Lord.**

I believe God works in our lives this way also. We face challenges from God, and God moves us further in our faith. We move towards a higher step in our commitment to God.

-Elijah promised Obadiah that he would be present. (1 Kings 18:15-16)

-Next scene: Ahab meets Elijah.

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" ¹⁸ "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. (1Kings 18:16-18 NIV)

Ahab calls Elijah a "trouble maker."

Of course, when God's messenger tells the truth, the truth troubles Ahab. **Often truth annoys and disturbs us.** There is a danger in not telling the truth, in this case compromising God's message.

Let me give you some examples from the Bible:

- Samuel had to tell the truth about the judgment of God to Eli.
- Moses did not compromise God's message when the Israelites disobeyed.
- Jesus' message was so costly, no wonder they crucified him.
- Elijah confronted the king saying that they had trouble because they had disobeyed God (I AM) and turned to Baal.

It is not easy to say the truth but it cannot be compromised. We should always ask God's wisdom to lead us to **know how to say the truth.**

-Elijah's next move is incredible. He challenges Baal and the Baal worshipers:

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." ²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. (1 King 18:19-20)

Then his next question hits the target:

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." (21)

How long you will "waver, halt, hesitate?"

The Hebrew word is *Paqah*, which means to limp.

How long you will jump from one to another?

How long you will limp and not stand firm on your feet with your convictions?

What happened to you all? Where is your loyalty to Yahweh?

Ahab's position was having more gods would be better. King Ahab's hesitant choices brought all the 10 tribes of Israel to compromising their faith in God.

-The challenge:

"I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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." (1Kings 18:23-24)

The challenge is very clear. I don't know what happened to the 400 prophets of prophets of **Asherah**. But **Baal's prophets**, came together on the high mountain of Carmel, and took the sacrifice and put it on the alter. They called their god for several hours, and nothing happened.

Elijah challenged them saying that perhaps their god was sleeping; maybe he was away for other business. They should cry out even louder. In fact, nothing happened.

Let me tell you that while we lived in Lebanon, we often visited a touristic place called Baalbeck. Today you can visit and see how their temples which are

decorated with images of Baal; it was considered fertility god. No wonder the Israelite were tempted to leave Yahweh and go to Baal. How strange, do we forget who God is?

Eugene Peterson describes Baal worship as follows:

“The worship of Baal is chaotic, frenetic and lengthy. It is sexual, sensual, and sensory. All the attention is focused on the actions of the worshiper. Baal worship is worship that seeks fulfillment through self-expression, worship that accepts the needs and desires and passions of the worshiper as its baseline.”¹

It sounds like today’s popular ideologies. **“It feels good, do it.”**

Kevin raised some important questions last week. In fact, it is a good review of the book of Leviticus. He said:

“If we were expected to keep the entire holiness code as spelled out in Leviticus, would we be willing to, or are we just looking for loop holes to say it does not apply anymore and not keep it?”

In my words, Do you compromise God’s ways?

I wonder about our worship service. I am careful when I organize the worship service; all we do should be to **focus on Christ** and not on our personal emotions and feelings.

What did God say to us this morning through the worship service?

Elijah’s offering:

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.”³² 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.³³ 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.”(1 King 18:31-33 NIV)

Three times he put water on the wood and the sacrifice. These dramatic actions are here to make one point. **God can work in impossible situations.** It is a demonstration of who Yahweh is.

Then Elijah’s prayer is very simple and direct:

“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. ³⁷ **Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”** (36-37)
Indeed, God sent the fire, and His presence was right there.

What can we learn?

1. Worship God and not the “self”.

I have witnessed too many times worship services where the stress is on self-fulfillment, emotions.

Some attend certain worship services because they like the music, or the band, or the pipe organ...

There is a culture these days of seeking self-fulfilling, exciting worship services.

Worship is a matter of the heart.

It is an act of surrendering to God.

Emotions are secondary. Music and style are secondary.

I believe in good music, band and choir. Yet, those are means for worship, and in the end **God’s name should be glorified**. God being center of your life.

-Jesus commanded us to worship God in truth and spirit. It is a matter of the heart.

2. Stop “limping” between two lives.

There is one God in your life and no other idols, “Baals”, practical solutions which will compromise your faith...

There is only one God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The world can give us solutions that sound practical, yet ungodly or unethical.

“I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God” (Isa 45:5)

Make up your mind about whom you will serve.

I don’t know what your idols are; you know your idols. If you are not sure, just look at your check book and your time schedule.

“Materialist doctrines of moral relativism and denial of personal responsibility undermine the ideal society of materialist dreams. Materialist religion is as deceptive, destructive, and pervasive as Baalism in Ahab’s Israel.” (NIV Commentary about 1King)

3. Watch out with whom you associate.

Ahab’s marriage with a woman who bought her god along brought catastrophe in the Northern Kingdom. Someone’s wife is the most important person in his life. If your partner does not have a commitment for Christ, how can you build a Christian household? My words are for young people who are planning to get

married. My mother became Christian latter in her life after was married to my dad. She prayed for my dad's conversion for 30 years. Eventually dad became Christian.

4. Mount Carmel is a foreshadow of Calvary.

Jesus chose 12 disciples who represented the 12 tribes of Israel. Elijah took 12 stones which represented the 12 tribes. Elijah used an animal sacrifice. God used His only Son as the only and the last sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. Three times they poured water on the sacrifice, which meant it is impossible to start a fire. Jesus was crucified on Friday, impossible to be raised any day. Yet, after three days God raised Him. Both stories show God's victory.

Let us come to Him. Choose your GOD. I choose Jesus Christ. I know many of you choose Jesus Christ. Come without "limping" between two worlds. Come in adoration and commitment. Come in prayer and humility bringing your sins to Him. Come, to Jesus.

Amen

1 Eugene Peterson, The Jesus Way P. 110