

It's Time to Hop Off the Fence

Men, we need to get serious about the prophet Elijah's key message: "If the Lord is God, follow Him!" If you don't know who Elijah was, let me introduce you. He was God's man—brave enough to stand alone before 450 men who opposed God and didn't believe Him. You can read his story in more detail in 1 Kings 18:20-39.

These men were prophets of Baal, a false god whose worship was forbidden in Israel. Elijah got in their collective face and threw down a challenge, the outcome of which would have national implications. The winner would determine if God would be served and feared throughout Israel.

Both parties were to call down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar.

"You call on your man-made god and I'll call on the Lord," Elijah said to the 450. "You go first."

But he didn't just sit back and watch. He taunted them. It's a dangerous game to taunt people, especially 450 at a time, but it must have been what God put in his mind to do.

The prophets of Baal really got into it. They danced, shouted and cut themselves. Elijah responded: "What? Your god doesn't answer? Maybe he's asleep. Shout louder, maybe you can wake him up.

"Maybe he's preoccupied, deep in thought!" (Some translators of this say Elijah was implying that their god was on the toilet.)

The prophets became hysterical. It was almost evening. They did everything they knew to do, but the Bible says simply,

“There was no response” (1 Kin. 18:29, NIV). The god, for whom they had deserted the Lord, wasn’t there. How different from God who says, “‘When they call on me, I will answer ...’” (Ps. 91:15, NLT).

Now Elijah took his turn. First he rebuilt the altar, adding 12 stones for the 12 tribes of Israel. Then he called for four large jars of water to be poured onto the sacrifice. “Do it again,” he said. “Now do it a third time.” The sacrifice was soaked.

Elijah was quiet now, silent before God. It was time for prayer. “‘Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself’” (1 Kin. 18:36-37).

There was no one-upmanship here, just quiet trust. This wasn’t really a contest to see which prophet was greatest. Elijah called on God to bring the people’s hearts back to Himself. If we were looking at this in the Hebrew, we would read, “Turn their backward hearts back again.”

And then it happened. Fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. Everything! The people screamed, “‘The Lord is God!’” They fell on their faces in utter abandonment of their stubbornness.

Elijah had a strong sermon for the people then and it is a message for people now. How long will you go hobbling, limping, wavering between two opinions? “‘If the Lord is God, follow him!’” (1 Kin. 18:21). Get off the fence! There are still a lot of men who are wavering, hobbling along full of pride, sitting on the fence saying, “I have my own views of religion.”

Elijah didn’t face unbelievers. He confronted men who wanted to believe their own way. They were religious but wrong. God’s men must say to their friends, lovingly but clearly, “It’s time to get off the fence. If the Lord is God, follow Him.”

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