

**A sermon preached by Emma Hodge
on Trinity Sunday (12th June) 2022
at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst
2nd in a sermon series on Elijah.**

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

Today we are continuing our sermon series looking at the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Today's passage sees Elijah in a contest with the priests and prophets who worshipped the god Baal.

However our passage starts part way through the story of Elijah and Ahab,

Previously on Elijah's story....

Ahab was the king and he married Jezebel who worshipped Baal and persuaded Ahab to convert to worship Baal as well. Jezebel had also persuaded Ahab to get rid of the prophets of the Lord. Ahab had a palace administrator called Obadiah who was faithful to the Lord and used his position to keep the prophets who followed the Lord safe by hiding them in a cave. Elijah prayed to the Lord and as a result there was a severe drought and famine in the land which lasted for over three years. This is where the first sermon in our series comes in, Elijah and the widow of Zarepath which John White preached on a couple of weeks ago, we then move on to the start of today's story.

Elijah sent a message to Ahab via Obadiah that Elijah wished to meet Ahab. When they met, Ahab accused Elijah of being a trouble maker. Elijah responded that he was not the trouble maker but Ahab was because he and his father's family had abandoned the Lord the God and converted to worshipping Baal¹

Elijah then requested that Ahab gathers everyone from all over Israel and the prophets of Baal, and also the prophets of another pagan god called Asherah to meet on Mount Carmel.

They all came together as agreed. Elijah then issued a challenge to those who were gathered on Mount Carmel – you can't worship both Baal and the Lord, you have to choose; as Elijah says *How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.*² *But the people said nothing.*²

Elijah then stated the obvious, there were more priests and prophets of the God Baal than there were of the Lord – he was the only one. He was outnumbered 450 to 1. We then come to the main point of the reading – the contest between the two gods – which one would send down fire when the priests and prophets asked. While our bible doesn't give all the details about what is said, just the main message from Elijah, and we know that the Lord will triumph, it would have been very different on the day, The prophets of the pagan gods believed in their god, otherwise why would they worship him and be prophets,

The god of Baal didn't respond but the Lord did, showing that the Lord is the true God. It may not be surprising that the people had started to follow Baal, he was a popular pagan god at the time and after all the king and the queen worshipped him, and there were also other gods but the people of Israel had forgotten one of the ten commandments, that of

¹ 1 Kings 18: 18

² 1 Kings 18:21b

having no other Gods apart from the Lord³ which the detail of the commandment instructs not to worship any other God

you shall have no other gods before me.

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.⁴

Oh dear, something so basic as only worshipping our Lord our God, had been forgotten, and this isn't the only instance of it in the bible, it is a message that Jesus reinforced when he stated that *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*⁵ and that for us to know God the Father, then we have to know God the Son and follow him and his teachings.

God seems to realise that we need constant reminding that we need to keep focusing on following Him and his teaching and commands. Our God forgives us when we forget Him and not prioritise him in our lives.

So what are the two main lessons we can learn from the story about Elijah and the Prophets of Baal:

Firstly, even though the people had turned away from God and had started to worship the false god Baal, it didn't mean that God had abandoned them. One of the purposes of the story was to get people to return to the Lord.

Many of us know people who used to come to church, to have faith but something has happened and they no longer believe, it doesn't matter if they gradually drifted away or if they suddenly stopped believing, God still cares about them and wants them to return to Him. It doesn't matter what they have done in their lives, God still wants them to return to him.

If we know someone who once had faith and came to church regularly but no longer comes, do we pray for them? It doesn't matter if we are the only one who is praying for them to come to know God again or if there are several others, Elijah was the only one prophet on Mount Carmel but through his prayers, lots of people returned to the Lord and gave up the worship of Baal.

If we are not praying for anyone could we? Or could we join with another person praying for someone they know to come to faith?

Secondly, do we obey God or do we think that we know better than Him? The Israelites thought that God's commands were optional, they forgot one of the 10 commandments, that of having no other God but him, today is Trinity Sunday when we focus on God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but it is still one God, just in three different persons. The Lord is clear, we are to have one God and that is Him, no-one else.

The Lord our God, knows us and loves us, exactly as we are. He also knows what is best for us and he wants us to focus on Him, to obey his instructions so that we can enjoy the full life that he has for us.

³ Exodus 20:3

⁴ Exodus 20:3, 5- 6

⁵ John 14:6

If we ensure that we prioritise him and not try and squeeze him into the spare moments of our lives. The people of Israel did just that, they tried to juggle worshipping the Lord and worshipping Baal, it didn't work. Their way was wrong, it disobeyed God's instructions. God's instructions are there for us and our benefit, the bible is the Word of God, and we need to read and understand it and apply it to our lives so we can follow God's instructions.