

Choices

Week 6: Elijah vs. Ahab & Jezebel

We are looking at people who chose between following God and going their own way. Today we are going to look at one person who chose God under extreme pressure and two others who didn't. Today we look at **Elijah vs. Ahab and Jezebel**. But first, a more contemporary story of someone who had the choice to follow or not.

Video interview...

At its core, this story is very simple. We have the king of Israel, Ahab, who has **married a foreign bride** named Jezebel, which is the one thing God didn't want and here is why. She brought her zealous worship of Baal and because Ahab wasn't fully choosing the God of Israel, the people were led astray. Baalism became the **state sponsored** religion in Israel. On the other side, you have **Elijah, the prophet, who is sent to bring them back to God.**

Baal is the rider on the clouds. He is the god of rain and fertility. He is pictured as a bull (productivity and wealth) holding a club (thunder) in one hand and a sprig (lightning) in the other. Must have had thumbs. **Pic. Of Baal**

Let's read the central verse every Jew repeated daily. This is called the Shema Israel. **It told them who they are.** ⁴ "Listen, O Israel! **The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.** ⁵ And you must love the LORD your God with **all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.** ⁶ And you must **commit yourselves wholeheartedly** to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. ⁸ Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Can you see the problem? You cannot add or mix something else into your faith in Yahweh. **Which is what we are saying about Jesus,** who is God's son, the promised King. It's all him or choose something else. **You can't add a little** something else to Jesus. You can't be **neutral** about Jesus.

Here is a meeting between Ahab and Elijah. ¹⁷ **When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"** The reason for this is that God has brought a drought on Israel because of their **reliance on Baal, the one who supposedly brings rain.** Elijah has been the one to announce this punishment from God, therefore, he is accused of causing this trouble. ¹⁸ "I

have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have **refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.** (Shema) ¹⁹ Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel." ²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "**How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!**" But the people were completely silent. 1 Kings 18:17-20

This is a showdown between Baal and God to see who will bring rain and who will be their God. It's one or the other.

³⁰Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he **repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down.** ³¹ He took **twelve stones**, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, 1 Kings 18:30-31

First, the prophets of Baal have their chance to call on their god to bring lightning down and rain to follow. This would be the sign that Baal is god. They do some sort of rain dance, calling upon Baal to come and prove he is god. Nothing happens so they cut themselves, letting the

drops of blood fall like the rain will any moment. Still nothing happens at which **Elijah starts to taunt** them to chant louder because their god might be hard of hearing. And still nothing happens.

Elijah has come to announce the coming of rain, but first he must clearly demonstrate the complete failure of Baal to bring rain. It will only be when Baal is stripped bare and shown to be impotent that the blessing of rain will come from the true God.

He places the offering on the rebuilt altar and has them drench it with water three times, running off into a trench he had dug around the altar. Then he prays this prayer.

*At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, **prove today that you are God in Israel** and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. 37 O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." 1 Kings 18:36-37*

After the failure of Baal to do the one thing he is supposed to do, God brings down fire from heaven, burning up the wood and the sacrifice on the altar.

At this, Elijah calls the people to gather up all of the prophets of Baal and they are killed. And not only that, but Elijah has someone go up to the top of the mountain and watch for rain clouds. He finally sees a cloud over the water that looks like the size of a man's hand. Elijah goes to Ahab who, I'm sure, has no idea what just hit him and he says. "Get moving because God is about to bring rain and an end to the drought."

What are the choices Elijah and Ahab/Jezebel have to make? **1. Rebuild and restore what has been torn down.**

Ahab, Elijah, and all of God's people saw this. Their choice is to join what God is doing that started with Elijah rebuilding the altar of God that had been knocked down. It was the restoration of the people of Israel, or at least those who came over to Elijah's side. God's covenant to be their God and bless them was reinstated.

We know what Elijah has chosen. He took the risk of challenging the state supported religion. He had already picked a team. But what would Ahab do? He has seen the conclusive victory of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is king, he can now rule as he was intended to do. Yes, Jezebel is powerful, but he is king. He can go back home and tell her you can either pack your bags or follow the one true God. "If you don't, then you

will meet the same fate as those 400 prophets. If you want to worship Baal, then go home to Phoenicia."

To choose God is to choose to rebuild God's people after God's direction. What would you do? OR better yet, what will you do?

This is the time to rebuild. It's not the time to worry about who isn't here. Or to worry about how I didn't get my way about this or that. Or whether I'm getting fed the way I like. It's time to set away our negative attitudes about the church and start doing things that rebuild and don't tear down.

We have come through a time when people have picked teams based upon politics, race, which news outlet you will listen to, masks and vaccinations. It's time to choose based upon rebuilding this church and the church in America.

This story is to God's people. That was a nation, Israel. Now it is the church, his people today. This challenge is not to rebuild America. It's the church. Those are not the same thing. If you rebuild the church, then you will positively affect the direction of our country.

What does it mean to rebuild and renew? It means that we have to do whatever we can to be the kind of church that produces people who live and love like

Jesus and who are actively making disciples. It's that simple. This is our primary commission from God. It is to go make disciples and that means helping people know how to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and commit to Jesus' mission.

Part of that is **serving in areas that help the church produce disciples.** We need to because people have left and people are not able to...

The best way is to really become a disciple who can make disciples. It won't work anymore to be a believer who is called to **be a good person and invite** people to church. **Most of our culture would not come if invited.** It's time to get in the game. **We have this setting where you worship** and hear Gods' word. Then we have our **bridge groups** (small groups), they are where the theory of following Jesus taught here lands in a relational environment. **Then there's service, either inside the church or in the community in God's name.** **Cultivate is specifically designed to help you serve in the community.** That's where we start. **You discover God's truth here, then you see how it looks in other people's lives in a bridge group, and then you take that word and join what God is doing around you.**

A huge jump-start at rebuilding happens this fall when we get a fresh start. We will restart the bridge groups,

preach about some of our most important foundation things, and do our **Come and See class**.

Elijah has made his choice. **I think he is hopeful that Ahab will do the same and that the restoration will move quickly.**

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. ² So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them." ³ **Elijah was afraid and fled** for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. ⁴ Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. **"I have had enough, LORD,"** he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." 1 Kings 19:1-4

I believe his disappointment is that Ahab didn't send Jezebel packing with her prophets and her fake god, Baal.

So what does Elijah do with this disappointment? He has another choice to make. **2. Give up or push through resistance.**

He has forgotten that God is good and there is dramatic evidence to back this up. It's the same for us.

- He forgot that the people turned to God at Carmel.
- He forgot that God brought fire down and then ended the drought.
- He has forgotten that Obadiah was also faithful.

So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Obadiah was a devoted follower of the LORD. ⁴ Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.) 1 Kings 18:3-4

We must recall God's goodness in the past and regularly answer the question in the here and now, "God how can you be so good?"

In the midst of a year full of disappointment, have you forgotten about God's goodness toward you? We can start with being adopted by him and not paying for our sin like we deserve. After that, make a list...

Did you fall into the despair and anger because everything is wrong and out of control and the left or the right is out to get you. Have you looked around at small numbers at worship and said, "What's the use?"

Did you know that there are a lot of people who are **getting out of pastoring** and other kinds of full time ministry? Some don't even believe any more. **Why? Because they have forgotten that God is real and he is good and that in this world we have to push through resistance, pain, and disappointment.**

What about us **corporately**, how have we seen his goodness? Cultivate, Beaverton, no debt, people getting baptized and more wanting to be baptized.

Elijah, because of his fear, leaves the country where Jezebel cannot reach him. Elijah has run away from the **broom tree he was sitting under and has gone to Mt. Horeb** as Moses had done. God meets him here. ¹¹ **"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He replied again, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars,**

and killed every one of your prophets. **I am the only one left**, and now they are trying to kill me, too." ¹⁵ **Then the LORD told him**, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶ Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. ¹⁷ Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! ¹⁸ Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!" 1 Kings 19:11-18

God is commissioning Elijah to join what he is doing to return Israel to their covenant relationship with him. **He is sending him to gather these people who are loyal to God** and want to purge the nation from Baal worship.

The next choice for Elijah and Ahab is...**3. Whine about resistance or seek out others God is using.**

We know that Ahab went back and whined to Jezebel about getting his butt kicked at Carmel. The question is, **will Elijah do what God told him to do** and go get these other people that God wants to use to completely destroy Baal worship.

Key phrase said twice, **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

Whining about the government, Whining about COVID
Whining about the culture changing

We can't simply get together in **holy huddles** and complain about how bad things are. **You can't meet those people God wants to use if you aren't looking for them in our community and within the church.**

Let's look at who is moving toward us and toward Jesus and help them learn how to join what God is doing in this world.

I believe in this next season there are people within the church who are going to come out of their **hibernation**.

Ultimately, we know that Elijah does as God told him. Ahab didn't. So here is how the story ends. First Elijah confronts Ahab again. ²⁰ "So, my enemy, you have found me!" Ahab exclaimed to Elijah. "Yes," Elijah answered, "I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the LORD's sight. ²¹ So now the LORD says, 'I will bring disaster on you and consume you. I will destroy every one of your male descendants, slave and free alike, anywhere in Israel! ²² I am going to destroy your family as I did the family of Jeroboam son of Nebat and the family of Baasha son of Ahijah, for you have made me very angry and have led Israel into sin.' ²³ "And regarding Jezebel, the LORD says, 'Dogs will eat Jezebel's body at the plot of land in Jezreel.' ²⁴ "The members of Ahab's family who

die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the field will be eaten by vultures. ²⁵ (No one else so completely sold himself to what was evil in the LORD's sight as Ahab did under the influence of his wife Jezebel. ²⁶ His worst outrage was worshiping idols just as the Amorites had done—the people whom the LORD had driven out from the land ahead of the Israelites.) 1 Kings 21:20-26

Elijah had to, at this point, choose to trust God to deal with Ahab and Jezebel. He chose to...4. Trust God to bring Justice.

A stray arrow killed Ahab during battle. As for Jezebel, let's read on. **When Jezebel, the queen mother, heard that Jehu had come to Jezreel, she painted her eyelids and fixed her hair and sat at a window. Remember Jehu is one of the guys Elijah was to commission once he got done pouting in that cave. ³¹ When Jehu entered the gate of the palace, she shouted at him, "Have you come in peace, you murderer? You're just like Zimri, who murdered his master!" ³² Jehu looked up and saw her at the window and shouted, "Who is on my side?" And two or three eunuchs looked out at him. ³³ "Throw her down!" Jehu yelled. So they threw her out the window, and her blood splattered against the wall and on the horses. And Jehu trampled her body under his horses' hooves. ³⁴ Then Jehu went into the palace and ate and drank. Afterward he said, "Someone go and bury this cursed woman, for she**

is the daughter of a king." ³⁵ But when they went out to bury her, they found only her skull, her feet, and her hands. ³⁶ When they returned and told Jehu, he stated, "This fulfills the message from the LORD, which he spoke through his servant Elijah from Tishbe: 'At the plot of land in Jezreel, dogs will eat Jezebel's body. ³⁷ Her remains will be scattered like dung on the plot of land in Jezreel, so that no one will be able to recognize her.'" 2 Kings 9:30-37

If you need to see things put right now where you have been wronged, then you will probably not have the patience to allow God to bring justice. That's when we stop trusting God, because we want to see it now. Once we stop trusting God, that's usually when we go our own way and bitterness takes root.

Look after each other, so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of **bitterness** grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. Hebrews 12:15

Get rid of all **bitterness**, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Ephesians 4:31

Or if you need to see things "put right" in America culturally then you will not be able to make the

choices to follow that Elijah made. Let's trust that to God and start doing what he called us to do.

Who joined Jesus on the mount of transfiguration? Moses and Elijah. He didn't get that honor because he made the convenient easy choices. He did what God was calling him to do, one of which was to pass the baton to his replacement, Elisha.

We know that this is not about Elijah. If Elijah were to show up here today, he would say the same. It's about the one he pointed people to and that is Jesus. Jesus perfected all of these choices that Elijah stumbled through.

Jesus chose to come to this world to restore The Kingdom of God.

Jesus didn't give up when the religious leaders of his people pushed back against him. He didn't give up when the mighty power of Rome came up against him. He didn't even give up when his closest people turned on him and denied him.

He didn't whine about that resistance as if he was outnumbered, he simply went about looking for the people the father was giving him to work with. He didn't whine that it wasn't a mighty army but a handful of men and women mostly from backwater Galilee.

Jesus brings justice on the cross by sacrificing himself.

Everything that Elijah did, Jesus perfected. That's why we follow him.

Learning to Follow

- What is my part in rebuilding and restoring the body of Christ here at Eagle Ridge?

Commit to pray about this and then act upon it.

List what we need.

List what you need.

- Take your prescription daily...Matthew 22:36-40

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"³⁷ Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40

