

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 3

**I WISH I WAS THERE
ON MT. CARMEL WITH ELIJAH
1 KINGS 18:16-39
04/30/2017**



MAIN POINT

The pageantry and theatrics of the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal would have been something amazing to see.

INTRODUCTION

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

Did you or anyone in your family convert to Christianity from another religion? Describe that experience and who influenced you. If not, how did you first encounter Christ?

What situations make people seek spiritual answers in life? What does that reveal about humanity?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 KINGS 18:16-21.

Ahab did exactly what Elijah asked. He sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Although Ahab did not know what Elijah planned, he probably believed he could use any meeting to his advantage. The drought may have caused some Israelites to believe they should repent and turn to the Lord, but others may have become angry with God because of their suffering. Perhaps Ahab hoped some might take out their anger against the Lord on Elijah, killing him and eliminating Ahab's enemy. More likely, since Elijah's prophecy concerning the drought had come true, Ahab feared not doing what Elijah asked.

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

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

Addressing the Israelites, Elijah accused them of indecisiveness. Rather than choosing to serve God or Baal, they wavered between the two. Some Israelites may have worshiped God as Israel's traditional God and also may have worshiped Baal, 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 deities. The presence of Ahab and the prophets of Baal might have frightened others into silence. When challenged to choose, the people refused.

Hesitating between two opinions is often a convenient way of delaying our submission to God. In what ways might our hesitation to give God our worship alert us to hidden idolatries in our life?

Read aloud Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13. Have you ever tried to serve two masters? What was it like?

Every person faces a challenge similar to the one Elijah presented on that day. Will we choose God to be Lord of our lives or will we be content to rely on our own abilities and resources? When we accept Christ as Savior, we still face daily choices of whether to seek and follow the Lord's guidance and to rely on His strength.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 KINGS 18:22-29.

What do you learn about Elijah from these verses?

What message was God sending to the people that day on Mount Carmel?

Before the Lord sent rain on the parched land, He wanted to demonstrate that He, not Baal, controlled the weather and sustained His people. Had the rain come without such a contest, Ahab, Jezebel, and many others would have claimed Baal finally had responded to their prayers and ended the drought the Lord had sent. For them, Baal would have proved to be the ultimate power. All Israel needed to understand Baal was not a real god and thus had no power.

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 the believer?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 KINGS 18:30-39.

What is significant to you about Elijah's prayer?

How important was Elijah's faith in asking God to act against Baal?

Elijah first asked God to act so people would know the true God of Israel was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Elijah wanted Israel to know that the Almighty God who had guided Israel's founders still cared for His people and desired their obedience. Elijah prayed for the Lord God to validate His prophet's ministry. He wanted Israel to know that he was God's servant and had done all these things at God's command. Elijah did not seek personal fame or justification. He wanted Israel to know the Lord still participated actively in their daily lives by providing guidance through His prophets. Elijah finally asked God to answer his prayer so the Israelites would know that the Lord is God. The people had been content to waver between commitment to Baal and the Lord God. Elijah wanted the Lord to demonstrate His power so the people would clearly see, turn from their sin, and follow the Lord.

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

Think back on your spiritual journey. What is one moment that stands out to you when you proclaimed with confidence, "The Lord, He is God"?



APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of the events in this story do you most wish you could have seen for yourself?

In this story, God clearly showed Himself as the Higher Power. 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”?

This text reminds us that there is no middle ground in our relationship with God. We are either living for Him in faith, or we are not. What stuff in your life tends to pull your attention away from God most easily? How can you counteract that tendency?

Where do you need strength right now to trust God in faith? How can our group help?

PRAY

Invite the people in your group to express prayer concerns. Pray for the concerns mentioned. Ask that God will grant wisdom and strength to trust Him against overwhelming odds. Pray for Christians who face strong opposition and threats because of their faith in God. Pray that ours would be true prayers of faith.

COMMENTARY

1 KINGS 18:16-39

18:16-19. 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?

18:20-21. 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.

18:22-25. 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.

18:26-29. 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.

18:30-39. 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..