

ARE YOU A FENCE WALKER OR FIRE CALLER

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt as if you were the only one who cared about how things would turn out or about doing things the right way? Maybe it was a particular ministry in your church or maybe it was your workplace or maybe it was even a situation within your own family? When it comes to trying to follow God do you ever have that same feeling? You feel like you are the only one trying to live for God while everyone else around you just seems to be doing whatever they want however they want and it seems as if you are on the losing side and Satan seems to be winning?

Welcome to **Week 4 of Kings and Kingdoms** as we continue our journey through the Bible and as we follow God's people Israel into a very challenging time in their history as a nation. As you may recall if you have been following along with us, during the time of the judges the people began to long for a king to lead their nation. Rather than allow God to be their king they wanted an earthly king to rule over them just like their neighbors had. Following the disastrous leadership of their first king King Saul, God was gracious enough to give them King David. And while we know that David wasn't a perfect king he did have a heart for trying to follow after God. Following David's reign was Solomon, David's son. And while Solomon did show some signs of promise early on by asking God for wisdom when he had the chance to ask God for anything, he didn't always follow that wisdom as we have been talking about over the last couple of weeks. And that brings us to today where Israel is going to go from being one unified nation into two divided kingdoms that will begin a spiritual slide in Israel that will eventually usher in the judgment of God where Israel will no longer be allowed to inhabit the Promised Land in peace under God's faithful protection. **Btw, when you make the constant choice to live outside the umbrella of God's protection don't be surprised when that protection is no longer there to cover you.** In fact, while Solomon was reigning over Israel God gave Israel a prophecy concerning what was to come in their immediate future as a result of Solomon's disobedience.

1 Kings 11:4 (NIV) "4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

1 Kings 11:11-13 (NIV) "11 So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. 12 Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

The culmination of this divided kingdom spelled out in verses 11-13 basically takes place in the next chapter when Solomon's son Rehoboam becomes king. When Rehoboam became king all the tribes of Israel along with Jeroboam who once served as Solomon's labor secretary, complained to Rehoboam about his father's harsh treatment of the people and how they didn't want to see a repeat performance of that treatment from him. After Rehoboam arrogantly rejects their concerns and threatens to make things even harder for them, the people revolt and

the 10 northern tribes make Jeroboam their king, rejecting Rehoboam and his leadership. Of course the only tribe that stays loyal to Rehoboam is the tribe of David which is Judah. This fracture in the kingdom not only physically divided the kingdom territorially but it also spiritually divided the kingdom as they will now have to institute separate places of worship since the temple that Solomon built was in the heart of Judah. It is important to note that from this point forward all references to "Israel" will be a reference to the Northern Kingdom comprised of the 10 tribes of Israel while "Judah" will be a reference to the Southern Kingdom (the home of the Temple and the City of Jerusalem) made up only of the tribe of Judah. You might be thinking to yourself, "Aren't there supposed to be 12 Tribes of Israel?" Well, there were! It's just that the 12th tribe was the tribe of Levi, and this tribe was dedicated to serving as the priesthood, therefore they did not receive territorial land along with the other 11 tribes.

This division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms is now going to really open the door for idolatry and false worship like never before. In fact, this division is going to lead to a spiritual decay in Israel that was even far worse than what was encountered during the time of the judges. A snapshot of this spiritual decay can be seen in 1 Kings 16.

1 Kings 16:29-33 (NIV) **29** In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. When we get to 1 Kings 16 it is important to note that 57 years have passed since the kingdom became divided. Ahab is the 8th king to rule over the Northern kingdom and notice what it says about him. **30** 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, (Remember Jeroboam was the first king to lead the northern kingdom after the nation split and his first order of business according to 1 Kings 12 was to make two golden calves where he encourage the people to worship them as the God who delivered them out of Egypt) **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. Samaria became to the Northern Kingdom what Jerusalem used to be for the entire nation before the split. In fact, if you recall Jesus and his conversation with the woman at the well in John 4. Their conversation revolved around where the proper place of worship was supposed to take place, Jerusalem or Samaria. The place of worship for the northern kingdom had become a place dedicated to pagan gods which started with Jeroboam.

But here is the encouraging thing! **No matter how bad things get, God is never without a witness or a remnant of His people to proclaim truth and hope to those who are facing God's judgment. However, for those of us who are dedicated to serving the Lord it can seem at times like you are the only one! The question is, will you be faithful even if everyone else around you is not?**

As we come to **1 Kings 18** Elijah, under the direction of God Himself, had declared a drought upon the land for the wickedness brought about by the idolatry being championed by king Ahab. After 3 years of no rain, a famine had occurred in the land. No water means no food. And so

God directs Elijah to go and confront Ahab face to face regarding this vile offense and to demonstrate that there is only ONE TRUE GOD in Israel. If he will follow through with what God has asked him to do, God promises to send rain on the land and end the drought. It is from Elijah's confrontation with Ahab that **I want us to learn some important lessons we need to be aware of if we want to be successful in standing for God in our culture today like Elijah stood for God in his.** So if you will turn to **1 Kings 18** I am going or PRAY for us as we prepare to open up God's word.

1 KINGS 18:1-14 (NIV)

1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." **2** So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria, **3** and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. **4** While Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) **5** Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals." **6** So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. **7** As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" **8** "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" **9** **"What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?"** **10** As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. **11** But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' **12** I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the Lord since my youth. **13** Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. **14** And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

Lesson #1 - In order to serve God faithfully we have to trust God with ALL aspects of our life! Obadiah obviously believed in the Lord or he would not have tried so hard to hide and take care of the prophets of God. However, as tends to be our problem, we sometimes think things depend on us more than we should. We lean upon our own abilities more than we do God's abilities. If He is worthy to be believed and worshiped then He is certainly worthy to be trusted with ALL aspects of our life! Without this type of mindset we will be inconsistent in our service for God. When we reach the limits of our own human capacity we will allow fear and the unknowns surrounding us to tempt us to resist what God desires. It is in these moments that we must trust God fully for if we do not we will end up resisting what God is asking us to do and will ultimately end up working in opposition to what God is actually trying to accomplish. Here is Obadiah working for the Lord by protecting the prophets of God from Jezebel. Yet, when Elijah asks him to arrange a meeting with Ahab he allows his fear to cause him to be hesitant to do

what Elijah has requested which was also a request from the Lord. As long as Obadiah felt like he could manage the situation he was good. But the moment his control of circumstances and situations were removed he was reluctant to do what Elijah was requesting. It is in those moments we must press hard into God and trust Him. Control is an illusion. What Obadiah forgot was that it was by God's grace and provision that he was able to do what he was doing for the prophets of God. God is ultimately responsible and in control of ALL aspects of our life. We would do well to remember that as we serve Him with our talents and abilities.

1 KINGS 18:15-19 (NIV) **15** Elijah said, "As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today." **16** 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. **19** 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."

Lesson #2 - The world wants to blame the WORD of GOD for our trouble but the real culprit is our SIN. The reality is God's word is only trying to point out the sin that is causing our real trouble. Satan has unfortunately deceived so many into thinking that our real problem is with God, God's word and God's people. It is literally a mindset of let's shoot the messenger even though the messenger is trying to help us by calling our attention to the real problem. Because he was walking in disobedience to God Ahab had brought the discipline of God upon the nation of Israel. He was the real "troubler of Israel". The drought and famine called for by Elijah was the result of idolatry and the worship of false gods that he was promoting. Rather than see it as his own actions that had caused such consequence he would rather make Elijah the bad guy. Unfortunately, the same thing is happening in our culture today. We see Christians, the church and ultimately God's word as bad and a problem that must be silenced rather than the solution to what is killing us. We may not always like what God's word has to say, but if we want to get to the root of the problems in our lives we have to know what it is that is causing our current situation so it can be addressed. If you are a follower of Christ you are a HOPE DEALER not a HOPE STEALER. You are a LIFE GIVER not a LIFE TAKER. Make sure that the actions of your life and your personal testimony doesn't fit the narrative the culture is trying to establish. You are not coming to make TROUBLE! You are coming to give LIFE and give HOPE!

1 KINGS 18:20-21 (NIV) **20** So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. **21** Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

Lesson #3 - Following God causes us to have to choose between TWO DISTINCT opinions! Much of our struggle in life is because we waiver between two opinions when only one can be true. According to James 1:8, "such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." Ultimate truth is objective by nature and is exclusive. God is either real or He is not. He is one or He is not. He is holy or He is not. He either desires we live in a way that honors Him or He doesn't. But whatever the case, all of these cannot be true or subject to our private

interpretation. This isn't Elijah versus Ahab. This is what is TRUE versus what is not. This is REAL versus what is the imagination of men. What you need to decide today is this, **Is GOD's word true and therefore unchanging? Or is it a bunch of religious fables and everyone needs to just decide their own truth?** But one thing is clear, it cannot be both! We cannot pick and choose what we like and don't like. We can't let culture be the arbiter because it is constantly changing. We need to pick a side and stop riding the fence.

1 KINGS 18:22-24 (NIV) 22 Then Elijah said to them, "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." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

Lesson #4 - There is an easy way to determine which one is RIGHT, we simply put the two opinions to the TEST. Whatever we do we cannot just excuse an opinion away because we don't like it or may not want to believe it to be so because it messes with our personal life. We need an experiment where we can analyze the facts objectively without bias or prejudice or a presupposed outcome. We must be open to the reality that we might be wrong. That our feelings might be wrong. That we may not know it all. Put your worldview to the test! I believe if you honestly seek for the truth you will find it and when you find it it will set you free.

John 8:31-32 (NIV) 31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. **32** Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

However, if we silence the truth because we are afraid of the challenge it may bring to our present opinion, this will certainly guarantee that we will walk in darkness and believe the lie.

1 KINGS 18:25-39 (NIV) 25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." **26** So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. **27** At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." **28** So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. **29** Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. **30** Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. **31** 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. (about 50 pounds 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." **34** "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. **35** The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "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." **38** Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. **39** When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

1 Kings 19:1-2 (NIV) Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. **2** So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Lesson #5 - Even in the face of objective truth there will still be those who will reject God!

Even after this incredible event where God showed Himself objectively true and the prophets of Baal as fake and untrustworthy, there will still be those who would reject God. And the same will be true for us as we engage the lost culture around us! But this doesn't mean that God is not real and His salvation through Jesus is not powerful and effective. It just means that there are some who have extremely hard hearts and no matter what, they will reject God and they will reject truth. Ultimately, you cannot make them believe. You will not argue them into the kingdom of God. Even in the face of such a powerful display of God's power they may still choose not to believe. And that is exactly what we see with Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Ultimately people like this must be drawn by God and their understanding must be opened to accept the Lord as God and to submit themselves to Him. This doesn't mean that you have failed. And it doesn't mean that you give up and quit. It just means that all will not be saved and find forgiveness in Christ. Not because God is not sufficient or powerful enough to accomplish it. It just means that there will be some who just don't want it. But there is one last lesson we need to learn from Elijah.

Lesson #6 - Even when it feels like you are standing by YOURSELF you are never ALONE!

1 Kings 19:3-5 (NIV) Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, **4** while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Elijah was exhausted mentally, emotionally, and spiritually! He stood up to Ahab and the prophets of Baal and God was victorious in the moment. But the battle was not over! And you know what? As long as you and I live on this earth our battle will not be over either. There are always going to be people who need the truth of God's word and there will always be adversaries trying to work against us.

There will always be situations that require boldness and courage and there will always be challenges to the message of truth we are trying to proclaim. But we are NEVER by ourselves and we are NEVER left alone. And neither was Elijah! First of all I want you to notice Elijah has God Himself ministering to his physical and emotional needs in the moment.

1 Kings 19:5-14 (NIV) 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." **6** He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

Never underestimate the power of the grace of God, a good snack, and a long nap. They can turn a hopeless situation into a minor inconvenience. Sometimes if we are struggling mentally, we may need to eat some food and take a nap. Notice here how God is ministering to Elijah's needs holistically. We all too often look to God for our spiritual care only and we forget that he is Sovereign and has full reign over not only our spiritual care, but also our physical care and our psychological care (mental health and emotional needs). Maybe you just need to slow down and let God tend to you holistically instead of only giving him authority over only one segment of who you are.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." **8** So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. **9** There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **10** He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." **11** The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. **12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. God whispers because He is close to us **13** When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **14** He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." I believe part of Elijah's struggle was that everyone did not repent after such a mighty display of God's power. He had to be discouraged that there was still opposition. Even though God had ministered to his soul Elijah is still battling discouragement regarding the effectiveness of his ministry and trying to process the feelings of being the only who seems to care about the things of the Lord. I want you to notice what God does next.

1 Kings 19:15-18 (NIV) 15 The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. **16** Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. **17** Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. In other words, get back to what I have called

you to do. You are still effective and your work is not done. God has called all of us to serve Him. And until your life is over, serve Him! He is oftentimes working in ways that we do not fully understand. And know this, you are not alone! Notice what He says to Elijah next.

18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.” God shows him that there are others who are fighting alongside of him and that He isn't the only one. In fact, I wonder how many of these have remained faithful because of Elijah's service and faithfulness to the Lord. This is not just a message for the preachers or our ministry leaders. If you are a follower of Jesus this is a message for you. Your life is having an impact. It is impacting your family, your neighbors and your co-workers. So be encouraged! Not only that but you also have the church who is fighting alongside of you. You are not alone!

I am so thankful for my brothers and sisters in Christ who are faithful to God and serve Him diligently. Out on the front lines of the day to day it can feel like you are all alone. In fact, one of the top ways the enemy tries to discourage us is to make us feel alone and isolated, even when surrounded by many people. How encouraging it is to know that there are others involved with us in the work. That is why God has given us the church!! So we can encourage one another and remind ourselves that we are not alone.

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation:

SO as we come to the close of our message this morning which lesson from Elijah's confrontation with Ahab do you need to press into today?

Have you trusted God with ALL aspects of your life? Or are there specific areas where you are trying to power through in your own strength?

Are you guilty of blaming God for your current situation? Or are you looking to Him for answers and solutions? SIN is the cause of our difficulties. Either our sin or someone else's sin. Jesus is our solution and our hope in times of trouble.

Are you wavering back and forth between two opinions? Will you put your opinion to the test and seek after the TRUTH? Will you stop being double minded and choose JESUS?

Do you feel all alone? God is near and He wants to comfort you! Are you striving to be a lone ranger Christian or are you plugged into the Body of Christ? (Covenant Partnership, Vgroup, Serving on a TEAM all are great ways to join with other believers and be encouraged as we face the ever changing culture)

Are you fulfilling your calling? Or have you allowed discouragement to sideline you?

Finally, maybe you are discouraged, tired, spent emotionally and physically exhausted?
Will you let God tend to you in this moment?