

Hope Church South Haven July 19th, 2026

1 Kings 18:16–40

Standing Alone #3

One phrase seems to define our culture: NO LONG-TERM COMMITMENT.

- Streaming services: **cancel anytime.**
- Apps: **unsubscribe whenever you want.**
- If a service provider or church disappoints you: **move on to the next.**

There's nothing wrong with those things. But when we hear that message *often enough*, it starts shaping the way we think. But when we hear that message *often enough*, **it starts shaping the way we live.**

- RELATIONSHIPS become temporary.
- CAREERS become stepping stones.
- Even our VALUES and CONVICTIONS become negotiable whenever the culture changes.

As a society we've become *uncomfortable* with **commitment.**

Unless you're a Detroit Lions fan. For decades you've shown up. Bought the jerseys. Defended the team. Every August you say: This is our year. Go Lions...That's commitment.

Just a side note: I sometimes wish that we will show that same kind of loyalty in our marriages and our friendships and even in our faith.

The truth is: REAL COMMITMENT always costs something. Maybe that's why we're so **determined to keep our options open**. But the problem is: *neutrality is an illusion*.

NOT CHOOSING IS STILL CHOOSING.

Every day something or someone **takes first place** in our lives. The only question is whether it's Jesus or something else.

That's exactly where Israel finds itself in **1 KINGS 18**.

They haven't abandoned GOD. They just don't want Him **to be their only God**.

They want God when He's convenient and **Baal when he is useful**.

Elijah steps onto Mount Carmel and asks a really UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTION:

How long are you going to keep playing both sides?

It isn't just a question for Israel 3000 years ago. It's the same question God is asking us today.

We're reading **1ST KINGS 18:16–40** today.

It's been more than three years since Elijah *announced the drought*. JEZEBEL

slaughtered many of God's prophets. The nation is spiritually divided. And God is sending Elijah back to Ahab.

Verses 16–20

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "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. //

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." So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount

Carmel.

- It's an incredible scene. The most powerful man in the nation **obeys the request of a fugitive prophet**.
- Ahab is that DESPERATE. The drought has done its damage.
- AHAB doesn't greet ELIJAH with relief. He greets him **with an accusation**. He blames ELIJAH and the LORD for *their suffering*.

- ELIJAH refuses to let him rewrite history. He confronts AHAB with the truth: **this is the consequences of your own rebellion**. This happened because of your own sins!
- The stage is set. One prophet against **850 pagan prophets and the king and the queen**.
- And MOUNT CARMEL *wasn't chosen randomly*:
 - ⇒ It sat on the border between Israel and Phoenicia.
 - ⇒ It was **associated with Baal worship**.
 - ⇒ If Baal was ever going to answer, this was home field advantage.

Verse 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.

- Elijah doesn't ACCUSE Israel of completely abandoning God. He *confronts* them for **sitting on the fence**.
- They weren't fully devoted to the Lord, but they weren't **fully committed to Baal** either.
- *They wanted both*. Hoping to **enjoy the benefits** of both.

Verses 22–24

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 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. 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.”

- ELIJAH lays down the challenge: **let’s see who the true God is.**
- He removes every excuse.
 - ⇒ Two identical sacrifices.
 - ⇒ The same preparation.
 - ⇒ No one strikes a match.
 - ⇒ *Whatever happens next can’t be explained away.*
- This wasn’t a random test. Baal was believed to **control storms** and **lightning** and **rain** and **fertility**.
- If Baal really had power, sending fire should be easy.
- God CHALLENGES Baal in the very area where he was **supposed to have power**.
- And throughout the Old Testament, *fire showed that God accepted a sacrifice.*

Verses 25–29

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." 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. 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." //

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 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.

- ELIJAH doesn't hold back. His words are sharp and sarcastic. And my personality loves it. His words deliberately **exposes the emptiness of Baal.**
- Their *cries* eventually become cuts. This wasn't DESPERATION alone. **It was how they worshipped Baal.** *They believed that if they suffered enough,* their god would respond.
- For NEARLY SIX HOURS they **cried** and **danced** and **cut** themselves.
- Then the writer delivers the devastating verdict:

No voice. No answer. No response.

- Baal is silent because he isn't there.

Verses 30–35

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. 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." //

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. 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." //

"Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

- Instead of shaming Israel. **ELIJAH invites the people to come and see.**
- He then **rebuilds the altar of the Lord** that had been torn down. Twelve stones representing twelve tribes.
 - ⇒ The kingdom may have been divided politically, but in God's eyes **His people still belonged to Him.**
 - ⇒ Before God *restores the land*. He reminds them of their identity.

- Then Elijah does the UNTHINKABLE. In the middle of a drought. When every drop of water mattered. **He drenches the bull and the wood and the altar.**
- He *removes any possible explanation* except one.
- **If fire falls now, it can only be God.**

Verses 36–38

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. //

Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” 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.

- ELIJAH prays a remarkably simple prayer. His request is simple: **show these people that You alone are God and turn their hearts back to You.**

⇒ His prayer isn't about proving himself. It **isn't about gaining followers** or **winning an argument**.

⇒ This moment is about *God's glory and Israel's restoration*.

- God ANSWERS **immediately**. God ANSWERS **overwhelmingly**.

- The fire doesn't just consume the sacrifice. It BURNS up the **wood** and the **stones** and even the **water in the trench**.
- There is no natural explanation for what happened. God leaves room for NO DOUBT.
The God who ANSWERED **is the living God**.

Verses 39–40

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord — he is God! The Lord — he is God!” Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” //

They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

- **יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים** (YHWH hu ha-Elohim) – They don’t just admit that Yahweh is a god.
They confess that He alone is God. Repeating it twice – there is no doubt about it.
- It wasn’t ELIJAH’s confidence that changed the people. It wasn’t an emotional experience. It wasn’t a clever argument.
- **God revealed Himself**.
- Real faith happens when God reveals Himself. It doesn’t happen because of our effort.
- That’s why they *fall facedown*. It’s the only right response when God reveals Himself.
Humble surrender.

- Then the story takes an uncomfortable turn. *The prophets of Baal are executed.*
- It's important to remember that this isn't a private citizen taking justice into his own hands. This takes place within **God's covenant nation**. Under the **terms and conditions** of the relationship that God *established for Israel*.
- These prophets had DEVOTED THEMSELVES to leading God's people away from Him.
What we see here is **covenant judgment**. Not personal revenge.

If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that troublemakers have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. You must destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock.

Deuteronomy 13:12–15 NIV

- This is not a model for the church today. AFTER THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS God's kingdom advances through the gospel. Not **through violence**.
- We *confront* false teachings with truth and not the sword.

What can we learn from this story?

From Israel's perspective:

Sitting on the fence is not an option.

Elijah's challenge isn't aimed at the prophets of Baal. It's aimed at the crowd:

How long will you keep trying to play both sides?

Israel didn't reject God completely. They were trying to worship both.

Before we criticize Israel, we should recognize ourselves. This isn't ancient history. It's Tuesday.

- **We pray** before making a decision we've already made.
- **We call ourselves Christians**, but our calendars and ambitions and priorities often *look the same* as everyone else's.
- **We want enough of Jesus** to feel comfortable but not enough for obedience that cost us something.

The issue wasn't only indecision. **It was misplaced trust.** *Israel turned to Baal* because they believed he could give them what they believed they needed most.

TIM KELLER defined an idol this way:

It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God.

At its core, Israel's question was simple: **Who will take care of us?**

That's still the question behind every idol. Who will take care of us?

- Maybe we think it is *money*.
- Or *approval*.
- Or your *health* or your *career* or even your *family*.

None of those things are wrong. **They're gifts from God**. But the moment *we begin looking to them* for security and *identity* and *hope* that only God can give, they've become more than a gift. They've **become our saviors**.

John Calvin suggested asking two questions to figure out what we really worship:

What do I pray about? How do I live?

Because our prayers reveal what we depend on. Our **lives reveal what we love**.

- **My CALENDAR**. What received the best of my time?
- **My WALLET**. Where did my money actually go?

- **My REACTIONS.** What makes me unusually angry and anxious and devastated when it's threatened or taken away?

These three things often reveal what we worship. Better than **any theology exam**.

That's why ELIJAH's question still echoes today. A divided heart isn't a peaceful compromise. It's a heart **trying to trust two different saviors**.

And sooner or later, *one of them will let you down*.

From Elijah's perspective:

Following God wholeheartedly is dangerous but it can change the world.

Put yourself in Elijah's shoes for a moment.

- He's a fugitive. Ahab has been searching for him.
- JEZEBEL has already **murdered the Yahweh's prophets**.

Yet ELIJAH *walks straight into the most dangerous place in Israel* and he publicly challenges the king and the queen and hundreds of pagan prophets.

If God doesn't answer, Elijah dies. That's not personality. **That's faith**.

Elijah's COURAGE came from knowing who he belonged to. That's why he never prayed to be famous or to win. He simply prayed: **Let it be known that You are God and I am Your servant.**

Identity first. **Mission second.** Who I am before what I do...

1ST KINGS 18 reminds us that *real courage grows out of surrender*. DIETRICH

BONHOEFFER – who died for Christ under Nazi Germany – wrote these words:

When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.

Bonhoeffer wasn't saying that every Christian will become a martyr and die for our faith.

He was REMINDING us that following Jesus always come at a cost. Not because *God enjoys when we suffer*. But because God **offers us something far greater** than the life we are so afraid to lose.

ELIJAH showed us that we need to care more about God's approval than public opinion.

That **God's reputation matters more than protecting my own**.

That's what real courage looks like. It's not being fearlessness. **It's about staying faithful.**

Most of us will never stand before a king. But every day we're given *opportunities to choose faithfulness over comfort*:

- **Speaking about my faith** when staying quiet would be easier.
- Choosing honesty when **nobody else would know**.
- Forgiving when **bitterness feels justified**.
- **Being generous** when holding on feels safer.

That's how God has always changed the world. THROUGH **ordinary people** who simply obey.

From God's perspective:

God really is God.

The God who answered Elijah isn't simply stronger than Baal. **He's altogether different.**

Baal was a god people believed they could manipulate.

- Perform harder.
- Offer more.
- Shout louder.

But the God of the Bible **cannot be manipulated**. He isn't a god we've designed to fit our lives. He is the living God. Which means He isn't one option among many. He wants us to RECOGNIZE that **He alone is God**.

JOHN STOTT captured the heart of the gospel when he wrote:

The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man.

That is exactly where this story points too. Israel DESERVED the same judgment as the **prophets of Baal**.

- For years they had compromised.
- For years they had wandered.
- For years they had trusted other gods.

Yet when *the fire fell*, it fell on their sacrifice. **Their sacrifice was accepted**.

The greatest miracle on Mount Carmel wasn't simply that fire fell from heaven. It was that **God's fire fell on the sacrifice** and not on *sinful people*.

This moment POINTS to another mountain. It POINTS to another sacrifice and another substitute. At the CROSS, **the judgment we deserved** *didn't fall on us*.

It fell on Christ.

That's why the invitation today isn't about merely trying harder. It's an invitation to come home.

The God who answered Elijah is still the God who welcomes sinners
through Jesus.