



So, I looked for someone ... who would stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land

WEEK TWO - ELIJAH

Read: 1 Kings 18

It is important to understand the context for what happened in this chapter. If we look back to **chapter 16:29-34** we learn that when Ahab became King over Israel, he did more evil deeds than all those who came before him. Given the horrendous acts of many of these kings, it is emphasising the level of his evil behaviour. He married Jezebel and set up an altar to worship Baal and made a wooden image. Verse 33 tells us he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. To provoke can be a positive, but here it means *to deliberately make someone annoyed or angry*.

In the following chapter, Elijah the Tishbite (an inhabitant of Gilead), declares that there will be no rain or dew, and in the books of Luke and James it tells us that time was three and a half years.

In chapter 18 we read God spoke to Elijah and said to present himself to King Ahab who described him as '*the troubler of Israel*'. Elijah's answer explains the basic problem: '*I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals*'. (Baal was the God of the Sidonians, the home country of Jezebel.)

- Before we look further into this remarkable event, let us ask ourselves if we have forsaken the commandments of the Lord. Are there people, habits, activities, that interfere with our walk with Jesus? Or have we become indifferent to the things of God? If so, right now ask for God's forgiveness which he willingly gives.

Elijah tells Ahab to send and gather all Israel on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table. (Baal was the chief male deity of the Canaanites and Phoenicians. He symbolised the productive forces of nature. Asherah was the wife of Baal in Canaanite mythology.)

Elijah sends out a challenge to the people of Israel: *How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him.* The people however did not answer.

It is like the challenge issued by Joshua as the Children of Israel were about to enter the promised land of Canaan: **Choose this Day Whom You Will Serve. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).**

- We constantly need to remind ourselves that we are serving the living God and think about what that means, and accordingly, how we should act.

Elijah was God's man to stand in the gap and told the people, he alone was a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets numbered four hundred and fifty. He then laid down the challenge for them to choose two bulls, one of which they must give to Elijah, then cut theirs into pieces, lay it on the wood but put no fire under it and he would do likewise. Verse 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."*

- Stop and think about the courage that statement required. Yet, it appeared that Elijah had no doubt that God was on his side. If you read through the earlier chapters of 1 Kings, you will understand why Elijah knew he could trust God.
- What have been your experiences of trusting God? You might say that God doesn't seem to answer your prayers. Remember however, this is a two-way relationship. We must follow God's ways and do his will if we expect him to answer our prayers. That acceptance may mean God has a different solution to the one you have in mind. Never forget that his ways are not our ways.

Verses 26-29 are wonderfully sarcastic. Your god not listening? Maybe he's asleep or on a journey; he may even be meditating, or in the original Arabic, he might have gone to the loo! They danced, shouted, prophesied, and cut themselves for six hours from 9am to 3pm, but nothing was happening.

There is something special about the time Elijah called a halt to their attempts, 3 pm was the time of the evening sacrifice. Elijah asked the people to come near to

him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been broken down. For us, as Christians, our hearts are regarded as the altar of the Lord.

- Do we need to repair the altar of the Lord in our lives? The Lord's prayer teaches us the importance of forgiving others if we want God to answer our prayers.

Verses 31-35 describe how Elijah took twelve stones each representing a tribe of Israel and when he had built the altar, he made a trench. He instructed them to pour the water over the altar and the waiting sacrifice. One might ask how they were able to get water given the time of drought. There is no indication that drinking water for humans and animals was not available, so this was the likely source.

Now Elijah stood before the altar and between the people, and God. He knew he was God's man for the hour.

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. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!" (verses 36-39)

- God can rid your heart of all the things that stand in the way of following him. Ask him today so that you too can say: **THE LORD, HE IS GOD!**

One prophet of God, against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. **NO CONTEST!**

- Let us ask God where we need to take a stand for him. It will be different for each of us but if we want to see our land turned to God, we have no choice.

Prayer: Father God give me the faith and courage to fulfil my calling in you.

Come Holy Spirit and let your fire fall on me and on Hull Minster

