

Peace be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In the last lesson, we studied the story of Solomon, son of the prophet David. We saw how **God gave Solomon exceptional wisdom and discernment**. In the time of King Solomon, Jerusalem was the most beautiful city in the world. But of all the things that Solomon constructed in Jerusalem, nothing surpassed the beauty of **the Temple of the Lord God**. King Solomon built the Temple to replace the Tent of Meeting, the special tent of worship, that Moses and the Israelites had constructed in the wilderness. Solomon employed two hundred thousand workers for seven years to build this beautiful place of worship. Today one can still see in Jerusalem the great stones of the foundation of the temple that Solomon built.

When the temple was finished, the priests sacrificed **thousands of sheep and bulls to symbolize the Redeemer** who would come and shed His precious blood for sinners. This is how they consecrated or devoted to God the temple that they had built for His name. After they had offered those animals and burnt them on the bronze altar of the temple, the priests carried the ark of the covenant, which had been in the Tent of Meeting, and placed it in the Holiest Place – the Holy of Holies - of the new temple. When the priests left the Holy of Holies, immediately the glory of the Lord filled the room. Just as the glory of God filled the Holy of Holies in the tent of worship which Moses and the Israelites made in the wilderness, so the glory of God filled the Holy of Holies in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem.

Concerning the rest of Solomon's life, the Scriptures tells us the latter part of his reign was not like the beginning. Listen to what is written in the first book of Kings, chapter

eleven. Again, we will notice that the holy Word of God does not hide the sins of the prophets. The Scripture says: *"King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women...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."*

Then Solomon built on the hills east of Jerusalem high places for all of his foreign wives, to burn incense and offer sacrifices to their gods. When he did this, God was angry with Solomon, because he had turned his back on the Word of the true and living God. Then God 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. 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. 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."

Thus the Scriptures tell us that after Solomon died, there was fighting and strife within the nation of Israel. The twelve tribes of Israel which came from the children of Jacob, **split in two**, just as God had told Solomon. They were no longer one nation; they became two nations, **Israel** and **Judah**. The ten tribes of Israel in the north of the land formed the kingdom of Israel. The tribe of Judah, joined by the little tribe of Benjamin, formed the southern kingdom of Judah. **Judah** was the tribe of King David and the lineage through which God had promised to bring **the Messiah** into the world.

The Scripture relates how those two nations had many kings. Most of the kings of Israel and Judah were wicked leaders; they turned their backs on the Lord and followed the religions of the nations around them. Among all those kings of Israel, one was more evil

and wicked than all the others. Do you know who it was? It was **King Ahab**. Ahab was the eighth king after Solomon.

Concerning Ahab, the Scripture says: *"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him."* He also married **Jezebel**, an evil woman who rejected the Word of the Lord. Furthermore, Ahab built in Israel a temple to the name of **Baal** whom the surrounding nations considered to be God. Thus Ahab greatly angered the Lord by leading the Israelites to follow an empty, false religion and its lying, false prophets.

However, in that time there was a man in Israel who walked with God. His name was **Elijah**. One day, God sent Elijah to King Ahab. *"Elijah...said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."*

Thus, for three and a half years no rain fell on the land of Israel. The famine became severe throughout the land. In chapter eighteen, the Scripture says:

*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." So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.... 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. **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. 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.

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 them 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 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. "O 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.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins. 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 round 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.

*At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O Lord, 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, O Lord, answer me, **so these people will know that you, O 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!"***

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 them there. And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on.

This amazing story is full of the glory and power of God, and does not really need our comments. However, before we conclude today, we ought to take note of what the prophet Elijah said to the people of Israel. Before he challenged the four hundred and fifty false prophets of Baal, Elijah said to the people, *"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him!"*

At first, the Israelites gave no response. However, when they saw how the Lord God answered the prayer of Elijah in causing fire to rain down from heaven upon his altar, the whole crowd fell down prostrate and cried, "*The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!*" Thus, in a single day, God's prophet, Elijah, exposed and discredited the false prophets of Baal before everyone and turned the hearts of the Israelites back to the Lord their God!

Why did God answer Elijah's prayer? Because Elijah loved the Lord God and believed His Word. **Why did God ignore the prayer of the prophets of Baal?** Because they were not praying to the one true God who had revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and the nation of Israel. The prophets of Baal ignored God's Word and followed their own religious traditions. They were zealous in observing their rituals, but they did not serve the living God--therefore, all their religious zeal was meaningless. They were like the men in the African proverb: "Ten men dig a deep hole, ten men fill it--there is plenty of dust, but no hole!" Like that, the prophets of Baal had plenty of religion, they made a lot of noise with their prayers and sacrifices, but it was all in vain--because it was not founded upon the Word of the Living God. "Plenty of dust, but no hole!"

Thus, on that momentous day, the prophet Elijah commanded the Israelites to choose either:

The Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or the empty religion of Baal;

The truth or a lie;

The way of righteousness or the way of unrighteousness;

The reliable Word of God or the unreliable words of man's religion.

What would be your response to Elijah's question: *"How long will you waver between two opinions?"* How long will you waver between the true Word of God and the worthless traditions established by men? The Holy Scripture says: *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* You cannot mix serving the Lord God and serving an empty religion. ***"How long will you waver between two opinions?"***

Thank you for listening. Next time we plan to look at the story of a prophet who spent three days inside a huge fish. Do you the name of this prophet? Join us next time for his amazing story....

God bless you as you ponder what Elijah told the Israelites, when he said,

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him!"

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