

“THE BELL”



BANGOR LIBERTY FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

Elijah, Prophets, Baal and You

In the eighteenth chapter of 1 Kings one finds the story of Elijah and the Prophets of Baal. At this point there had been a drought and famine raging for nearly three years in the kingdom of Israel, or Sumaria as it was commonly called. Elijah sends word to Ahab that he is ready to meet. At the meeting Elijah tells Ahab to gather all of the nation of Israel, along with the 400 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah that regularly eat with the king and his queen Jezebel. In time they all gather at Mount Carmel and Elijah, first challenges the nation of Israel that they must make a choice that day to either follow the one true God, or Baal. *“If the Lord is God follow him; but if Baal is then follow him.”* (1 Kings 18:21) The people remain silent, so Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a contest. One last struggle to determine who the real god truly is.

The idea is to have two bulls brought in and then each side would prepare it for sacrifice and an altar would be built and prepared for sacrifice, each side would build an altar with wood for a fire and then call upon their god to light the fire that would consume the sacrifice. Elijah allows his opponents to go first in this challenge. 1 Kings 18, verse 26 says, “And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, answer us!’” But, there was no voice and no answer, so they continued to move around the altar they had made. At noon, Elijah began to mock them.

Encouraging them to cry louder to their god, sarcastically asking if maybe he was in the bathroom relieving himself or if he could he, their god, was on a journey. The false prophets cried louder and began to cut themselves with sword and lance as was their custom. From noon until three in the afternoon they raged on crying as blood

gushed from their wounds, but still there was no answer or response from their god. At that point Elijah calls to the people to gather around him and he began to rebuild the altar of the Lord that had been knocked down by Ahab and Jezebel’s followers years before. He selected twelve stones representing the twelve sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” and with the stone he built an altar in the name of the Lord. He then dug a trench around the altar large enough to contain a bushel of seed. He then placed wood on the altar and cut the bull into pieces and place them on the wood. Elijah then had the people fill four large jars with water and pour it on the bull, the wood and the altar. Three time he had them pour water out on the offering. This water ran off the altar and filled the trench around the altar as well.

At the time of the afternoon offering, 3pm,

“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!”⁴⁰ 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.” (1 Kings 18:36-40)

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Now I share this story with you so that we can look at four simple lessons we can learn from Elijah and the Prophets of Baal.

First, all religions are not the same. There is a modern assertion that they are. But Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one come to the Father except through Me.”* (John 14:6) So contrary to what the culture may say, there are not many ways to heaven—there is only one.

Second, enthusiasm for something and actions are not always signs of spiritual maturity. The prophets of Baal were enthusiastic in their actions on Mount Carmel and fully believed what they were doing was right. But the sincerity of your efforts mean very little if what you believe is just wrong. Mount Carmel proved that decisively.

Third, faith is not the most important thing. Now, hold on before you get upset by that statement and just consider this. The people who followed Baal had a sincere faith. They had likely worshiped this God their whole lives. They believed in Baal, they had faith in Baal. That faith, however, no matter how sincere, or how long it had been held, was worthless because the object of their faith was worthless. Faith does not get you into heaven unless it is faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ. Mount Carmel demonstrates there is only One deserving of your faith.

Finally, the faith you live by better be good enough to die by. Just as faith in Baal failed to bring an end to famine and drought, faith that brings neither hope in a crisis or help in your distress is of no real value. God built up the faith of Elijah in the solemnity of a brook, the confines and company of a widow and while living in the wilderness. He did that so that when Elijah needed his faith in the big moment of his life, when he drew a line in the sand for himself and the people of Israel to choose a side, his faith was valuable and meaningful because he truly trusted God.

While you and I may never be called upon to battle priests of a false religion in quite so dramatic a circumstance as Elijah, God does lead us into difficult times that push and stretch us beyond our comfort level. God wants each of us to have a faith like Elijah because then we don't fear the bully at school, the difficult co-worker, the challenging spouse, or the doctor's appointment we've been dreading. The choice is do we want to live for God and be His follower? Or do we choose to keep living for the other things that motivate us and fill our lives? That is the question that Mount Carmel asks of each of us.

LIBRARY LEDGE – Library Shelves

What do you want in a library? Fiction? We have a large number of fiction books including authors such as Jan Karon, Janette Oke, Karen Kingsbury, Tracie Peterson and so many more! Devotions? We have many to choose from. Chicken Soup for the Soul books full of short stories? We have many of those as well. Books about Quakers? We have those, too. We also have so many more books to help us grow as Christians. The last book I read was **A Family for Christmas** by Kate Welsh. Although this Christmas season has past, I think you would enjoy this book. It is less about Christmas and more about a broken family and how they prayed and trusted God to make their family whole again. I enjoyed it greatly.

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Mystery Friend

Our Mystery Friend for February was born in Marshall County, IA. They are so old that the school they attended no longer exists. Our Mystery Friend is one of 7 children and has two children. In their job they work around animals. Favorite foods are anything Mexican. They went to Italy for a tournament. Most people would not know that our Mystery Friend rode a bicycle from Richmond, IN to Washington, DC. They commented that Bangor Liberty Friends is a caring and accepting community of believers.

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The answer will be in next month's Bell.

The Mystery Friend for January was Barb Evertsen

Coming Events

February

22 Quaker Men's Family Banquet
10:00am early bird session with
ft. John Muhanji & Robert Wafula of
African Yearly Meeting.
BBQ lunch Cost \$18.00

Evening Featured Speaker: Van
Harden WHO radio

Pie Auction (and other stuff) follows
speaker. Where? Musco Tech WPU

March

14 "Generous Congregations
Workshop" at William Penn
University.

28 Spring body Meeting @
Grinnell Friends Church