

Mission: Possible

Elijah – Breaking Spiritual Strongholds – Part 2

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HOCL

Today we are continuing in our Series, Mission: Possible and we'll be looking at Part 2 of the Story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel.

So, turn with me if you would to 1 Kings 18, and for the message today we'll be reading vs. 16-39.

Read 1 Kings 18:16-39

¹⁶ 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 (King Ahab's wife and she was BAD news!!!) table."

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.**

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." 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^[a] 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 (now remember, they were in a dry, famine land!) 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!"

What a moment that must have been!!?? They just witnessed the One True God making the impossible, possible and it changed the course of their lives!!!

And what I want to do today is simply walk us through this story to remind us of our first 2 points from a couple of weeks ago and then I'll share the last two points about how strongholds work in our lives and then how we can break them.

So if you're taking notes today, let's get into these 4 thoughts..2 of which I will be repeating from a few Sundays ago.

In verse 18, it tells us this.....", "Elijah replied (to King Ahab, but it was also intended for his soon to be audience as well). "But you and your father's family have caused trouble. **You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals**"

So if we're looking at this idea of strongholds in our lives, we can learn from this verse that

- 1. Spiritual strongholds begin when we ABANDON the Lord's COMMANDS and follow other gods**
 - a. Let me just say a couple of things about commands –When Parents give their kids instructions to do something, the children are required to do what their parents have instructed them to do. Can you imagine if you told your child to do something, and their response was, 'ahh, maybe?'...'I'll get around to it later'.....'nah, I don't feel like it'....and they just continued to do whatever they wanted to do!!?? And that's just how we are sometimes when our Father, God, instructs us to do something and our response is often less than obedient and we just say "'ahh, maybe?'...'I'll get around to it later'.....'nah, I don't feel like it'! Commandments are not suggestions!! Commandments are directives, orders, instructions, and decrees!!! And so when God tells us in His word that these are his COMMANDMENTS, we have a duty then as believers in God, to DO what His commandments tell us to DO!!
 - b. And so what happens is this.....when we choose to abandon the commands that God gives to us, we begin to develop strongholds in our lives.
 - c. And we have to ask ourselves the question here, "Am I living a life according to God's commands, or am I living a life that abandons God's commands? And if our answer is that we ARE abandoning God's commands, we are really saying that we are intentionally choosing to live a life in DISOBEDIENCE to HIM and we will have to deal with the consequences of that disobedience. Much like the child who disobeys their parent by not doing as they are instructed.

Alright, let's move on..... 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!!"

Spiritual Strongholds begin when we abandon the commandments of God but they progress

2. Spiritual strongholds progress when we **WAVER** between **TWO** opinions. Now let's pause here and look at this significance and what was really taking place when Elijah called them out with this question!
- a. First, Elijah was insisting that they clarify the difference *the worship of Baal and the worship of Jehovah*. Most of the people who had gathered here thought that Jehovah was God, and that Baal was God too; and for this reason the worship of both was quite ok, it was normal, and consistent for their spiritual condition. The people didn't reject the God of their fathers wholly, nor did they bow before Baal wholly; they believed in many gods, they thought both Gods might be worshiped, and each of them have a share in their hearts. And Elijah was saying, "No!! this will not do, these are *two* very different opinions; you can never make them one, they are two contradictory things which can never be combined." And so instead of combining the two, which is impossible, Elijah was saying that they were hesitating, wavering, and they needed to make a decision because they couldn't worship 2 Dieties. Let me ask you a question.....do we worship more than just one God? Maybe it's not a diety, but maybe it's another thing that has taken first place in your life? Maybe it's our job? Maybe it's our family? Maybe it's our money? If so, know this.....it can't work that way. We either worship God and forsake the rest or we forsake God and worship the rest.
 - b. The second thought here is that Elijah *calls these waverers to an account for the amount of time they had consumed in making their choice*. Some of them might have replied to Elijah's question of "How Long....?" By saying, "We have not had yet an opportunity of judging between God and Baal; we have not yet had time enough to make up our minds;" but Elijah puts away that objection, and he says, "*How long* will you waver between two opinions? For three and a half years not a drop of rain has fallen at the command of Jehovah; is that not proof enough for you!? Haven't you been waiting all that time expecting me, Jehovah's servant, to come and by my word, Jehovah will give you rain; and yet, though you yourselves are starving, your cattle dead, your fields thirsty, and your meadows covered with dust, like the very deserts, yet all this time of judgment, and trial and affliction, has it not been enough for you to make up your minds!!!???" "*How long* then," Elijah said, "will you waver?" Friends, how long will it take for us to stop wavering!?!? What amount of proof do we need before we know that we know, that we know God is God. What will it take for us!!!??? Will it take a famine? Will it take a fire for God to prove himself to us?
 - c. And the third thought is this.... The masses of people who had worshiped Jehovah and Baal, and who were now undecided, might reply to Elijah's question with this..."*How do you know that we do not believe that Jehovah is God? How do you know we are not decided in our opinion? Elijah, aren't you judging just a little bit more than you should be here?*" The prophet would meet this objection by saying, "I know you are not decided in opinion, because *you are not even decided in your practice*. If God be God, *follow him*; if Baal, *follow him*!" We have to take a hard look in our mirror and ask ourselves if our practice is lining up with who we say we serve and who we say we are following!!

And it's this thought that moves us onto our 3rd thought here from this passage.

Spiritual Strongholds begin when we abandon God's commands. Spritiual Stronholds progress when we waver between 2 opinions, and #3

3. **Spiritual Strongholds take control of our lives when we do and say NOTHING (vs. 21 says, "But the people said nothing."** When given the challenge of who they were going to follow, they did and said NOTHING!!! They had chosen to get to a place in their spiritual journey where APATHY set in!!

Apathy: Indifference, unconcern, laziness – apathy is doing and saying NOTHING!! Friends listen, Apathy is the greatest stronghold that can take control of our lives as believers!!! And if we put some descriptives here for how they were apathetic we would find that

- a. *These people were Passionless – they didn't really care about anything! They weren't fully passionate for God. They weren't fully passionate for Baal. They just were. No excitement, no adventure, no challenge, no making a difference. NOTHING. If we're going to get out of this stronghold of Apathy, we have to be passionate about life and our spiritual condition! It's been said that "Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion." Satan is happy when we are apathetic believers!! And It's because we're no threat to him.*
- b. *We also see here that these people Lacked commitment – they had one foot in God's camp, one foot in Baal's camp and they weren't practicing their worship fully to one or the other. Their commitment and loyalty was non-existent! And friends listen..... A lack of commitment and a lack of loyalty in our lives will take a good man or a good woman down a bad spiritual path. Elijah here was telling them to make a commitment!!! Either Choose God or Choose Baal, but don't continue to live a life where you're committed to neither!! God wants us to be committed to Him!*
- c. *And then letter "c", we'll find that these people were ultimately Self-serving – they wanted the benefits that came with worshipping God, Jehovah. They wanted his promises and provisions to be evident in their lives!! And they also wanted the benefits that came with worshipping Baal. In part 1 of this message I shared with you that **If we looked through history, we would find that Baal worship was a degrading religion. It was this bizarre mixture of idolatry, perverted sexuality, and child sacrifice. The pagans believed Baal controlled the rising and the setting of the sun. Baal was also considered the god who brought forth the seasons, and the god who brought forth or withheld the rains. And because ancient Israel was an agricultural nation, Baal was an extremely powerful deity. Men and women who came to worship Baal would offer a sacrifice and then engage in some sort of sexual activity with the priests and priestesses. They believed that if you were joined physically to one of those priests or priestesses of Baal, the power of Baal would be transferred to you. And so Baal worship appealed on one level to the mind, on another level to their economic well-being, and on a deeper level to the desires of their flesh.***

So how are we doing? Are we apathetic in our spiritual life? Here's what I think will happen if this stronghold of apathy would be broken in our lives

- It would change how we grow spiritually.
- It would change how we lead our families
- It would change how we work
- It would change how we worship
- It would change how we live in community with one another
- And it would change the community that is desperately looking and needing passionate, committed believers to lead the way!

And then the fourth point....

4. **Spiritual strongholds are BROKEN when our HEARTS turn back to God** - vs. 37-39 says, "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!” when our hearts are turned back to God, strongholds are broken and we are set free !!!

The strongholds in the lives of these people here in our passage were broken when they first

- a. *Acknowledged God’s sovereignty – “The Lord!, He is GOD!!” To be sovereign means to rule over, to be the leader, and to be the ONE who is Worshipped!! What we are saying when we sing or proclaim that God is sovereign is that he has jurisdiction over us, that we yield to him and that we surrender all of our ways to his plan for our lives!! When was the last time you shouted in triumph that “the Lord, He is God!!” and proclaimed his Sovereignty over your life!!?*
- b. *We find here that as a part of breaking strongholds and turning back to God required them to also repent of their ways – Elijah says here the phrase “turning their hearts back AGAIN” – this implies that they were once followers God – Jehovah, but somewhere along the path of their life, they got side-tracked and their hearts and lives turned away from the things of God. And Elijah said, “God, would you bring them back? Would you cause them to turn from their ways and repent of their sins?” And God is calling you and I to do the same thing. If strongholds are to be broken in our lives, they can not be broken without repentance and turning our hearts back to God. What are some things you need to repent from today in order to get your heart turned back to God? Is it rebellion? Disobedience? Is it Apathy? Is it an attitude or behavior? (Pause for prayer??)*
- c. *And finally here in our passage, we see that by Worshipping God, their stronghold was broken!! You see when we make a decision to worship God, and God alone, we’re saying that our priority is on Him, and that our heart is right, and that we no longer desire the strongholds of this world to take control over us!*

Friends, I don’t know what strongholds you deal with. Maybe it’s apathy? Maybe it’s something else? But you need to know today that Christ did not come so that you would remain struggling with strongholds. Christ came so that you could be free and that you could have an abundant, well lived, victorious life!!!

Phillipians 4:13 tells us that “we can do all things through Christ, who gives us strength!!” And we can break through strongholds that we face, and turn our hearts to God, through His power and His promises, and His provisions!

Nothing is impossible with God!!

Prayer