

WHOM WILL YOU SERVE?

For a number of decades our nation has plunged head long into a morass of man-centeredness that we commonly call Secular Humanism. This cancer has come to be the national religion of the United States. Its message, that the God of Creation is of no consequence, has been touted and shouted in our schools, in our legislation, and even in many institutions that bear the name “church.” Most of our churches are so weak spiritually as to be practically dead. They are too weak to care or even be aware of their condition. Instead of the “milk and honey” of the Promised Land, we have been fed a saccharine-laced soup of half-truths and near-truth so that we are undernourished to the point of starvation.

Almost all people, even those who are called Christian, have been conditioned to look to the government or to education or to modern medicine for their everyday provision. We put our trust in our bank accounts and stock portfolios and hardly give God a thought. We have gone with the crowd to worship at the shrine of irresponsible freedom and have put more value on the pleasure of the moment than on common decency, the rights of others, or what God says is right or wrong. We have made our sacrifices on the altar of the goddess of “freedom of choice” by the senseless slaughter of over 40 million unborn human beings. Is there really any doubt about the answer to the question “Whom do we serve?”

After the break up of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom (which kept the name Israel) drifted away from God and incorporated the religions of the pagans into their society. They ended up with a mixture of true and false religion. Instead of being “black or white” they had shades of gray. The result has been called syncretism - an attempt to align two alien faiths and make them one. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) attempted to worship both God and Baal. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) was often apostate in that they would swing totally to pagan ways or they would return to God. Apostasy can be recognized and dealt with. Syncretism is, by nature, difficult to recognize and is often protected in the name of “reasonableness.”

Israel had one of the greatest prophets of all time in Elijah and at the same time had a king named Ahab and a queen named Jezebel. Their marriage was an example of combining two alien cultures. Ahab was an Israelite, but Jezebel was a Phoenician from Tyre. Her father was king Ethbaal, obviously named for the pagan god he worshiped. We can even see traces of the word “baal” in Jezebel’s name. It is not surprising that she influenced Ahab to build a temple to Baal and to support 950 prophets of Baal. Her influence corrupted the government and the people. This sorry state of affairs caused the prophet Elijah to challenge Ahab and Jezebel on many occasions. Eventually, Elijah called for a showdown between God and Baal. He challenged the people of Israel to make a choice and he challenged the prophets of Baal to demonstrate whether their god had **any** power.

On Mount Carmel, Elijah and 450 of the prophets of Baal faced off in the sight of the people. The challenge was to see whose God could or would send fire to consume an offering. You are familiar with the story of how the prophets of Baal called out to a false deity who had no ears to hear and no power to act. Elijah mocked them and encouraged them to call louder so they might “wake him up.” For hours they carried on and **nothing** happened.

1 KINGS 18:30-32 Elijah called the people to come near so he could have many witnesses of what God was going to do. The very reason for the challenge of the prophets of Baal was to demonstrate to the people the power of the true and living God.

The first task for Elijah was to repair the altar of the Lord that was on Mount Carmel. The Bible tells us it has been broken down. When things are left unused they fall into disrepair and when things are not valued they fall into disuse. The altar areas of many of our churches are little used today. Those churches that have taken on the “way of the world” and have tried to combine the philosophy and psychology of the day with the wisdom and way of the Living God see more use for the psychological counseling session than a time of sacrifice, confession, obedience and praise at the altar of God. The 20th Century Church needs to “repair to” the altar of the Lord.

Elijah took twelve stones to build the altar. These represented the twelve tribes of the descendants of Jacob who was given the name “Israel.” Altars need to be built on some basis and the mention of Jacob’s name being changed to Israel is significant in that it was at that occasion that Jacob really surrendered to the Lord and quit relying on his own strength. It was his conversion experience. Our

altars also need basis or foundation and we are reminded in the New Testament, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” [1Cor 3:11] Our altars must be based on the atoning and sanctifying work of Jesus Who is Lord of our life.

The final thing that Elijah did was to dig a trench around the altar. In digging the trench he defined the boundary of the altar area. It was in that area God was going to work. We tend to confuse the fact that God is everywhere with the fact that God chooses to work and manifest Himself in certain areas. If we see God working in a particular area, then we need to go where He is working to be included in what God is doing.

1 KINGS 18:33-35 The sacrifice was prepared in the appropriate order. The wood was placed on the altar in a certain way and the bullock was cut up and placed there in a prescribed manner. We would do well to recognize that proper decorum is important when we approach God in a time of worship. When Jesus taught us to pray saying “Hallowed be Thy Name” we were put on notice that proper reverence is due our Great God! We should seek His face in His way.

Elijah then did something very unusual: He had people bring barrels of water to him to pour on the meat, the wood, and the altar area. It was so much that it even filled the trench around the altar. For this demonstration of God’s power it would take something more than ordinary fire to consume the offering. If fire was going to burn up this offering it had to be supernatural. There would be no doubt in the minds of the people who saw what was to happen. Some have suggested that the use of the water was an expression of repentance.

1 KINGS 18:36-37 We are not told what time of day the altar was prepared, but at the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah prayed a simple prayer of faith to the God of the ancestors of the people. The same God had called Abraham. He had given Isaac in a miraculous birth to Sarah. This same God had chosen Jacob and named him Israel because he had struggled with God and with man and had overcome. Yahweh was still God and just as powerful to save as He had always been. We see in Elijah’s prayer that all he had done was based on instructions he had been given by God. This is an important lesson for each of us. Whatever we do should be based on God’s word to us and not on our own ideas. It is an appropriate prayer to ask God to demonstrate His power so that people may KNOW He is God.

1 KINGS 18:38-39 When God acts, we can know that it is He. The “fire of the Lord” was so consuming it burned up everything -- even the water and the stones. Needless to say, the people were moved in awe and reverence to worship God. We need to pray for the “fire of the Lord” to impact our lives and consume our sacrifices that we place on His altar. In doing so, others will be drawn to Him and they will find salvation and new life as they confess “The Lord, He is THE God!”