

THE MESSENGER



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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Why Go Ye Limping Between Two Sides?

by Jim Everett

Approximately fifty-seven years passed in which six ungodly, idolatrous kings reigned before Ahab became king in Israel and Elijah came on the scene. Those kings were commonly described as “they walked in the ways of Jeroboam.” When Ahab came to reign in Israel, he also did that which was evil in the sight of God above all the others who had reigned before him. But he heaped yet one more sin on top of the mountain of all the others – he took to wife Jezebel and served the god Baal (I Kings 16:30-31). Jezebel was the driving force behind Ahab that further corrupted the moral fiber of the nation and thrust away true worship (I Kings 21:20).

Though the northern tribes of Israel had, from their inception as a separate nation, been involved in idol worship, no god was as corrupting in its effect upon the people as was Baal, and Baal was the god for whom Jezebel had such an affinity. There were many forms of Baal worship that preceded Jezebel’s Phoenician Baal but she was especially fervent in saturating the land with his altars and temples. It was through her efforts that the people had become enamored with Baal worship.

So, when Elijah prophesied in the northern kingdom, faith in God was at an all time low, because Baal worship had proliferated. And, from Elijah’s perspective, Israel had not only thrown down God’s altars, killed his prophets, and forsaken his covenant (I Kings 19:14) but he alone was left to fight the battle for God. Though God had reserved some seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, when Elijah had the contest with Jezebel’s 450 prophets, he alone stood there with God.

Elijah beckoned Israel to the mountain of decision and entreated them to make a definitive stand. If Baal is god, serve him but if God is God, then serve him – you cannot serve them both. His challenging words to Israel were at a time when they must make a decision, for if they continue the downward spiraling trend, their doom is inevitable. There

was no decisive answer from the people to this challenge. Perhaps they were convicted by their own conscience and to answer would be to their own condemnation (see John 8:9). After Elijah's contest with Jezebel's prophets, they say, "Jehovah, he is God" (I Kings 18:39), but there is no real religious and moral reform. Not too many years later the nation fell to Assyria.

What preacher has not used the challenging words of Elijah in an appeal to an audience? Appropriately we quote his bidding: "Why go limping between two sides?" We try to stem the tide of a departure from God and his ways but it seems, at times, that our efforts are like restraining the oceanic breakers with a fish net. We appeal with a sense of urgency as we see the decaying morals of our nation and the worldliness that has invaded God's people.

When we draw from New Testament writers we see similar pleas. James says that we must be decisive when we approach God's throne to ask for wisdom: "let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like the wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed" (1:6). Such a man will receive nothing from the Lord (v. 7). Then, he observes that a "double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (v. 8). This observation is designed to describe the man who wants this one time and then another time wants that; he cannot make up his mind. Literally, the "double minded" man is called a "two souled" man: he is as if he were two people each wanting different things at different times. God hears no such prayers. Make up your mind about what you really want.

Similarly, Peter tells Christians who are journeying through this world as strangers, "Wherefore, gird up the loins of our minds" (I Pet. 1:13). The expression is drawn, in this context, from the figure of one preparing to labor or run by drawing up the skirts of his robe and binding them to his belt in order to move freely. Here, Peter references that figure to our minds. "Make up your minds decisively . . . Instead of letting their thoughts, purposes, decisions hang loose while they move leisurely along in life as impulse and occasion may move them, the readers are to gird up their minds like people who are energetically set on going somewhere. To gird up the loins means business, decisive action, not idling, not drifting after this and that momentary attraction" (Lenski, 51).

We echo the challenge of the prophet Elijah: "If materialism is to be our god, then give self to it wholly but if God is God, then serve him with all the heart." We can't keep limping between the two sides. And paying lip service to God while longing for the god of this world is not only a miserable existence it accomplishes nothing in our relationship with God. Let us gather together to our own Mt. Carmel – it's time to decide which God we will serve (Matt. 6:24).

NOTES & NEWS: Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses. *"...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16*