

# The Lord Turns Back Wavering Hearts

1 Kings 18:16-39 • 2021-09-19



According to a 2021 survey, church membership in our nation has dropped below the majority for the first time ever. That survey includes all types of churches and religions.

Yet the majority of churches in our nation have been Christian churches and their numbers have been declining. Christians are now clearly in the minority. There are still parts of the world where Christianity is increasing year-by-year. But not in our nation. Not anymore. If you make a public witness to the faith, you will be in the minority. If you stand up against the lies of the devil, you will be in the minority. So, are you going to do it? Someone needs to make a stand and bolster the faith of the wavering all around us. Can you do it knowing that you'll be opposed by many who might even hate you? Could you do it knowing it may even cost you your life?

I'm not so sure that many of us could withstand such a confrontation. But we read earlier about a man sent to confront a powerful, wicked, and godless king. That man even taunted and mocked the godless king. He stepped up and did what you and I might struggle to even think about doing. His name was Elijah. And he knew that the people around him were abandoning worship of the Lord in startling numbers. Someone had to act to turn back wavering hearts. The Lord used him to bolster many wavering hearts. And what he did still bolsters our hearts. Today we will look at 1 Kings 18 to see how the Lord turns back hearts to worship him.

Elijah had witnessed many abandoning the truth. They were following King Ahab's lies. He is described as the most wicked of all the kings of Israel. Ahab had no qualms about sacrificing to idols. He even forced people to turn away from the Lord and worship Baal, the false god of rain and fertility. Baal worship involved practicing many degrading sex rites in his honor. It also involved child sacrifice. It was horrid. And Ahab's wife wasn't content to just leave worshippers of the Lord alone. She chased after and killed the prophets of the Lord. Things were at their worst ever in Israel: *"There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel."* (1 Ki 21:25)

So, the Lord intervened. Not with destruction, but with a call to turn back. Elijah came to Ahab with a message from the Lord, *"There will be no rain or dew in the land for the next few years except at my word."* The drought was severe. For three years, not a drop of rain fell for the prophets of Baal, the so called god of the rain clouds, fertility and life. God brought Ahab to his knees so that he was finally ready to give Elijah an audience. Elijah appeared to the king.

"Is that you, you trouble of Israel?" Ahab cried out. Ahab had suffered under his own sins. Yet when he is confronted, he blames the Lord's messenger –not himself. Someone who has rejected the Lord will not be quick to admit guilt. Blame will be tossed on the messenger. Jesus was called a troublemaker –even a devil. The apostle Paul was accused of being a rabble-rouser and riot starter. Many Christians have joined Elijah in carrying many false labels of blame.

But Elijah knew the real reason for the drought. *"You have abandoned the Lord's commands."* He told the king. Even with the most wicked of unbelievers, even with this hardened enemy of God's people the Lord displays patient mercy. Ahab is still given the chance --three years – to turn to the Lord in repentance.

And the Lord was interested in more than turning the heart of Ahab. Elijah asked him to gather the people and to hold an assembly of all the prophets of Baal. They were to meet on Mount Carmel. The appointed day came. Many of Israel's leaders were gathered along with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah then went before all the people and laid out the big question before them all, *"Why do you waver between two sides? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."* God still desired to save their hearts from hell.

Doesn't our God desire the same for all the people in our nation, a majority of which do not worship him? Many of them are wavering too. How many people will take on the name of the Lord and with one hand offer sacrifices to the Lord and with another hand to Baal? I'm sure no one in our nation really worships a god named Baal. Yet doesn't the false worship of house, car, sports, and tech possessions resemble the cultic calf-worship which was considered no big deal by Ahab? No one today calls on Baal by performing a degrading sexual rite. Yet how many people treat sexual relations as the ought, namely, a gift of God to be handled with honor? Or is it okay to just do what feels right regardless of the Creator? And of course, we aren't offering our children on altars to Baal. But who is our nation really worshipping? On whose altar are the millions of babies killed each year in our nation? It is certainly not done in the name of the Lord! And I don't have to point out the sharp opposition to God's people when they speak God's law. Not many are killed, not yet. But the opposition is already beyond just calling faithful Christians, "troublers."

Elijah "the troubler" posed his big question. All that followed his question was silence. Not a single voice was brave enough to cry out that he would follow the Lord alone. How did things ever get so bad? "Hundreds of years ago the vast majority of our nation confessed to worship the Lord," Elijah could have said. Hundreds of years earlier the crowd in Joshua's day said wholeheartedly, "We will serve the Lord." What happened?

Were they so concerned about a good harvest that they slowly added on the false gods of rain? Perhaps they saw enough YouTube videos about how to have a better life. Maybe they failed to teach their children Bible history. Maybe attending worship of the Lord became too hard with their busy schedules. Maybe it all started with a small complaint and ended with a big wavering heart. It used to be a majority who worshipped the Lord. Not anymore. How did it happen in our nation? Hearts waver. The majority will not stand up for Christ. Silence soon becomes opposition.

Elijah should have just left. God should have just abandoned Israel as a lost cause. They had turned their hearts away and deserved to have God's wrath turned on them. God had no reason to have his prophet stand there that day on Mount Carmel --no reason except for his mercy and yearning desire that the wavering people might turn back to him.

Elijah proposed a test. All the prophets of Baal were to prepare a bull for sacrifice on an altar. Elijah would do the same. The God who answered by fire would be proved true. The people agreed. The prophets of Baal began to call on their god. Several hours passed. They danced, they cut themselves, they shouted frantically. Elijah taunted them "Maybe your god is asleep or busy!" No one answered. They tried until evening came. No one answered. That's how it will always be when those who have turned from the Lord look to find help from their god. No one will answer.

Elijah repaired an old altar to the Lord and drenched it with water. *He 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. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."* With a tremendous display the Lord sent down fire which licked up the water and even burned up the altar. There was no mistake. All shouted, "The Lord, he is God!"

Do you want strength to speak up as a witness to the Lord? Consider why he did all this in Elijah's time. He did it "to turn their hearts back again." No other God in history has acted for the sake of the hearts of his people. But our God acted in mercy for our benefit. Baal demanded horrible degrading sacrifices of body and life. And he gave nothing in return but silence. The Lord doesn't demand we make an offering, but instead offered his Son for us all. He did this to bring our hearts back to him. *"Christ died for sin, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous --to bring you to God."*  
(1 Peter 3:18)

The Lord did it all with the greatest display in history: Jesus Christ. They called him a troublemaker. They wanted him to prove he had the authority to stir things up in the house of God. Jesus responded with a challenge for them and a sign. "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." In other words, "You want proof that the Lord is God and I am? Destroy this body and watch me raise it back to life on the third day. The God who raises his Son back after his sacrifice is the true God." He alone could answer and do this incredible sign.

His disciples saw him alive and declared, "Jesus, you are my Lord and my God!" He promised forgiveness and eternal life to all who trust in him. Remember that you will stand on that last great Day of Judgment and the earth and everything in it will be destroyed by fire. But you will be spared by his mercy. Your body will be raised from the dust and even as the earth is destroyed by fire you will shout out in joy. Because of what Jesus has done you will live and proclaim, "The Lord, he is God!" And with all who trust in him you will forever proclaim, "Our God reigns."

Have you ever seen that bumper sticker "Coexist"? It spells out the letters with different symbols from different religions around the world. Obviously, there are a few different ways of understanding the meaning of that bumper sticker. It might mean to say that all religions should get along and tolerate each other in peace. Or it might mean to say that all religions are leading to the same end. There is a danger in that message. Firstly, false religions will never fully tolerate the true religion. Ahab and Jezebel were killing off the prophets of the Lord. That's what the devil ultimately wants. He doesn't want tolerance and coexistence. He wants to silence the disciples of Jesus. And secondly all false religions will lead to horrible deeds and all it offers is a mute and empty god. The Lord alone is God. The only lasting existence that is possible is life through him. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ.

Do you see an opportunity to speak up and make a stand when so many have turned away from the truth of Scripture? Make a stand. Make clear through your life that you support a faithful Christian ministry. Make your witness clear and unwavering. Act on behalf of those in darkness and worshipping other gods. Their god will not answer them when they cry out for comfort when a loved one dies. Their god will not rescue them when death comes into their own lives. Their god will not bring them into eternal glory on the last day. Because their god is no god. But you know the Lord. He hears. He answers in mercy. He has given the greatest sign of his authority.

When you need strength to stand in the face of opposition, when it feels like the majority is all against you, then remember what God did for his people. When you feel powerless and timid, remember this account. Remember the fire consuming the water-soaked altar in sight of the people of Israel. Remember God accepting the sacrifice "to turn back their hearts again." Remember the sacrifice of Christ which was offered and accepted, "to bring you to God." Remember him who raised Jesus to life. Remember the God who will destroy all that exists but will raise you from death to be with him forever. Face the false prophets and the wavering believers of this world with fullest confidence as you proclaim him as our God and Savior. The Lord turns back wavering hearts. Why waver? None is greater!