



[1 Kings 18:19-21](#)

(19) Now therefore, send *and* gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." (20) So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. (21) And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

[1 Kings 18:36](#)

(36) And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word.

[1 Kings 18:39](#)

(39) Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!"

New King James Version

Elijah is quite instructive here. He began to prophesy in a time of immediate crisis, one that would become far worse before it ever improved. There was tremendous evil to overcome. His ministry took place about 150 years before Israel was to fall, becoming the [Lost Ten Tribes](#), so [God](#) was beginning to make a powerful witness to them. Elijah's work was to reveal the true God to Israel in a time of growing national crisis. Elijah prepared the way for Elisha, who had a double portion of Elijah's spirit and did many more [miracles](#). In this regard, Elijah was a type of John the Baptist, and Elisha, a type of Christ. God's pattern is being established. He sends someone long before the real crisis reaches its peak, while it is building.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for 1 Kings 18:19-21 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

Elijah says disturbing things. This is a prophet's job, a hallmark of a prophet of God. People like to feel comfortable. The only trouble is that people like to feel comfortable in moral mediocrity. They become "settled on their lees," as it says in [Zephaniah 1:12](#). The prophet comes along and troubles people by awakening them to their sins, making them feel guilty about their relationships with God and each other. He awakens them to their spiritual and moral responsibilities. These Israelites were lethargic in terms of true, spiritual matters.

When a person is freezing to death, he feels a pleasant numbness that he does not want to end. He just goes to sleep as he is freezing to death. But when heat is applied, and the blood begins rushing into the affected areas, pain immediately occurs. Though it hurts, the pain is indicative of rescue and cure. God sends a prophet to people who are cold in their relationship with God—spiritually freezing to death—though they want to stay that way. The prophet turns the heat on, and they become angry with him when he is actually working to make them better. He is often accused of causing their pain.

A prophet's life is not a happy situation. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Jeremiah, who moaned and complained to God, "This is more difficult than You ever told me it would be. You tricked me." He did not like the position God put him in. He wanted people to like him, which is understandable. Nevertheless, he was still faithful, and he did his job. Yet, he was in trouble his whole life, from his teenage years on.

There are several ideas as to exactly what Elijah meant by "How long will you falter between two opinions?" One idea is that he means, "How long are you going to hop from branch to branch?"—like a bird in a tree. The bird cannot make up its mind where it wants to settle down, so it just keeps hopping around. Another idea is that it pictures a person shifting his weight from one foot to the other, indicating a degree of lameness. A third is that he is describing somebody teetering on a tightrope and trying to maintain his balance. Whatever the case, there is no doubt about Elijah's intent: "How long will you keep shifting from one opinion to the other?" Their spiritual lethargy for the true God made them uncommitted. Their commitment went one way, and then it went the other way.

Once Elijah began preaching, their conscience pricked them, and it encouraged them to worship the true God. But their carnality and their fear of men persuaded them to worship Baal, because they wanted to be friends with their fellow Israelites. They were straddling the fence in a precarious state of imbalance, attempting to combine the worship of God with the more popular worship of Baal and Asherah. This is typical Israelitish [syncretism](#), but it will not work.

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At one point in *A Stillness at Appomattox* by Bruce Catton, he deals with soldiers who left the service of their army—either the Confederate army or the Union army. These soldiers would surrender themselves to the other side to be given a bit of favor and put into prison. In exchange, they would offer information about their unit. For a while, both sides—the Confederate and the Union—accepted those turncoats and took their information. However, before the war was over, both sides were summarily executing anybody who did this because those traitors could not be trusted. Most of the information they gave turned out to be wrong, to be lies. Most of them were just saving themselves and making themselves comfortable in their situation. They were not committed to the side that they were supposed to be on. Elijah was dealing with the same thing here, albeit spiritually.

When Elijah preached his message, it put the people in a bind because they knew their conscience was telling them that they had to commit themselves to God or to Baal. It disturbed them. Only the individual could decide which side he would be on, because Elijah made it clear, "God does not want you the way you are. Either you are going to be committed to Him or not. If you will not be committed to Him, you are going to die."

Baal, of course, could not talk to them, but if he could, he would probably have said basically the same thing, so the people were in a very uncomfortable situation. The lesson for us becomes clear, because [Jesus](#) says the same thing ([Matthew 6:24](#); [12:25](#)). The Sovereign Creator is not a God who allows His favor to be bought with crumbs. He is a loving Master who only is to be obeyed and served—and only on His terms.

Elijah was sent by God, and he was fulfilling the responsibility of a prophet, to prod the people to whom he was sent to their responsibilities. He was to be an aid in getting them from their state of being merely "churched" to that of being truly religious and servants of the Most High God.

Some become discouraged with the church because we are always being told—to some measure anyway—disturbing things about ourselves. But church is where we come to have our minds stretched and measured against Christ's standard. For one to keep on coming to services and leaving, like a theatergoer, without his options, opinions, or decisions resolved but deferred, is an erosion of character. "Whatever is not of [faith](#) is [sin](#)" ([Romans 14:23](#)).

The sum of what Elijah said is actually spiritually dangerous, due to the fact that God is judging. Christ's purpose is to cure, not merely to comfort, so pain will be often involved when dealing with a prophet.

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— John W. Ritenbaugh

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