

A DIVIDED PEOPLE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 18:20-26,30-39

CONTEXT

Following the pattern of Jeroboam, every king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel did what was evil in the Lord's eyes. The worst was Ahab, who set up a temple for the false god Baal in the capital city of Samaria and made an Asherah pole, leading Israel further into idolatry. The Lord sent Elijah to Ahab to prophesy about a three-year drought throughout Israel as a punishment against the wicked rule of Ahab and his father, Omri (1 Kings 17:1; 18:18). With no rain in the land and the famine affecting their food, the time had come for Elijah to present the question to the people of Israel: Who is the true God, Baal or the Lord?

KEY CONCEPT

The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.

As you examine 1 Kings 18:20-26,30-39:

- Recognize that Elijah demanded that the people stop trying to worship both God and Baal.
- Dwell on the fact that a true, living God will act and respond to His people.



TIMELINE

The Kingdom Is Divided
(1 Kings 12)

Wicked Ahab Becomes King
in Israel (1 Kings 16)

SESSION STUDY:
**2: Elijah Challenges the Prophets
of Baal at Mount Carmel**

Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam Lead
Their Nations in Idolatry (1 Kings 12-14)

The Prophet Elijah Confronts
Ahab (1 Kings 17-21):

3: Elijah Declares God's Judgment
for Naboth's Vineyard

1: Elijah Prophesies a Famine

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: 1 Kings 17:1-18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: 1 Kings 19:1-21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: 1 Kings 18:1-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: 1 Kings 20:1-43 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: 1 Kings 18:20-46 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 97 |



Scan this QR code
to access this session's
Scripture passages.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

1 KINGS 18:20-26

PEOPLE WILL FOLLOW THE LORD OR THEY WILL FOLLOW COUNTERFEIT GODS.

Circle each use of the word “answer.” Underline any number or reference to quantities.

20 So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel.

21 Then Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him. But if Baal, follow him.” But the people didn’t answer him a word. **22** Then Elijah said to the people, “I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. **23** Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. **24** Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The God who answers with fire, he is God.” All the people answered, “That’s fine.” **25** Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Since you are so numerous, choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. Then call on the name of your god but don’t light the fire.” **26** So they took the bull that he gave them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound; no one answered. Then they danced around the altar they had made.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE KINGDOM: The kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly, the kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ.

Key Concept: The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.



King Ahab had established Baal and Asherah worship in Israel, though that had come at the cost of no rain in the land for three years (1 Kings 16:30-33; 18:1). Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had executed the Lord's prophets (18:4). So it may have seemed to the Israelites as if Baal were more powerful than the Lord, and were it to rain, they might have attributed that to Baal. Therefore, Elijah issued a challenge to the Israelites that they should only follow the one true God. They could not serve both God and Baal; one would always have their devotion.

The terms of Elijah's challenge allowed each deity to show their strength with an element both were believed to command: fire. Baal was the Canaanite god of lightning and fertility; so if Baal indeed were a god, then he would have no trouble setting a sacrifice ablaze with a bolt from the sky. The terms were acceptable to the people and the false prophets, and to sweeten the set up, Elijah let Baal's prophets pick their bull and go first.

How might you challenge the false gods of your culture in a way that people will listen?

The prophets of Baal called on their god until evening using prayer, dancing, and their most vigorous, bloody practices (18:26-29). But no fire descended, no lightning bolts flashed. No sound from the sky, only the voices of their prophets. No answer from their god, only the silence of nothingness.

The prophets looked foolish for their efforts, and Elijah mocked them as such (18:27), because those who follow false gods are foolish, just as it is foolish to think an idol crafted by a human being could control the weather or anything for that matter (Isaiah 44:9-20). The modern idols we bow to in place of God are just as foolish. These may even be good gifts and important responsibilities from the Lord, but none of our idols can compare with the one true God—none of them can save.

What are some modern-day idols that draw people away from the Lord?



THE TRUE GOD WILL ANSWER, ACT, AND REVEAL HIMSELF AS LORD.

Highlight Elijah's simple prayer to the Lord.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near me." So all the people approached him.

Then he repaired the LORD's altar that had been torn down: **31** Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel will be your name"—**32** and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. **33** Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, "Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood."

34 Then he said, "A second time!" and they did it a second time. And then he said, "A third time!" and they did it a third time. **35** So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water. **36** At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things. **37** Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back." **38** Then the LORD's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. **39** When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"

Key Concept: The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.



Even though God's people were divided into two nations, Elijah rebuilt an altar with twelve stones so all twelve tribes were represented in this sacrificial showdown. It may have been decades since the people in the north had seen an altar to the Lord with an appropriate sacrifice on it. This would have reminded the Israelites of God's faithfulness in the past as well as His covenant.

Elijah's next step was to douse the altar and sacrifice with water, possibly drawn from the nearby Mediterranean Sea on account of the famine in the land. By drenching the sacrifice, Elijah seemed to make this challenge more difficult for his God, yet he acted in faith according to God's word (v. 36). This set up God's glory to be displayed all the more in the presence of the people as the Lord would answer, act, and reveal Himself as the only true God.

Should we try to make our circumstances more difficult to help point people's attention to the Lord? Why or why not?

Baal's prophets spent all day begging their god to answer them with fire, but all their efforts amounted to nothing. By contrast, Elijah's prayer to the Lord was an economy of words. And within

seconds of Elijah's petition, God didn't just burn up the sacrificial animal, He incinerated the drenched altar and dried up the overflowing trench. God did the impossible at Elijah's prayer.

The true, living God will act and respond to His people. God proved Himself to be the one true God to the Israelites, and their response showed their recognition. The Lord turned their hearts back to fear Him and to know that He alone is God. Unfortunately, witnessing this event did not stir up a national revival as the rest of Israel's history shows.

How has God answered your prayers, and how did you show your gratitude?

CHRIST CONNECTION

The Lord is the one true God, and "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11).

PROS AND CONS

Using 1 Kings 18:20-26,30-39, consider how the Israelites might have evaluated the pros and cons of worshiping the Lord or Baal.

WORSHIP OF BAAL

PROS

CONS

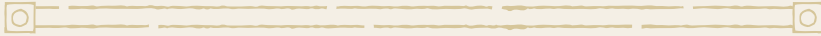
WORSHIP OF THE LORD

PROS

CONS

What are some idols that draw us away from God? How can we keep God's good gifts in perspective so that the Lord alone is the God we worship?

Key Concept: The Lord alone is the true God and worthy of worship.



HEAD

How are you forming your understanding of who God is and who is God?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 97. Praise the Lord that He alone is God and worthy of worship. Confess the ways you might worship idols of your own making. And commit yourself to obedience to the Lord's commands for the sake of His glory and His gospel mission in the world.



HEART

How are you wavering in your opinions regarding the Lord and potential idols?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

What opportunities might you have this week to obey the Lord, whether alone or with fellow believers?

