

# AHAB'S IDOLATRY



## + SESSION OUTLINE

1. Ahab leads the people further into idolatry (1 Kings 16:29-34).
2. Elijah leads the people toward repentance (1 Kings 18:15-21).
3. God's power leads the people toward worship (1 Kings 18:36-39).

Background Passage: 1 Kings 15–18

## + WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God will not fail to confront evil, but neither will He fail to offer mercy to those who repent.

## + HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Elijah was a prophet God used to perform amazing miracles to draw His people back to Himself, yet Elijah still faced persecution and opposition from those who rejected God. Elijah's example points forward to Jesus, the greatest prophet, who endured opposition and rejection for delivering God's words of life.

## + HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Christ suffered and died on our behalf, we rely on God for the strength we need to deliver His message no matter the hardships we may face.

# GROUP TIME

NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

**SETTING:** Because of Jeroboam's idolatry, his whole house was wiped out in judgment (1 Kings 14:10). The kings of Israel that followed failed to restore the kingdom to a healthy place. Over and over again, they walked in the ways of Jeroboam, in the ways of idolatry and sinfulness. With each passing king, it seemed to be getting worse. Then King Ahab came to power, and he was more evil than all the others. And of course, the people followed. But in God's mercy and grace, He sent messengers and prophets to speak truth and to call for a return to the Lord. Some would listen, and some would not.

**EXPLAIN:** When we face opposition or persecution for our faith, it is easy to want to cower and not speak the truth because we are afraid. Think of a time when you knew you needed to speak the truth to someone about God or His Word (i.e., this could be a time when you were sharing the gospel, or a time when someone you knew was walking in sin).

**DISCUSS:** **How did you feel when you did or did not follow through and speak the truth? What was the result?** (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

**TRANSITION:** We are called by God to speak the truth in love. Whether this be with those who do not know Jesus or those in the church struggling with sin, it is our responsibility to boldly proclaim God's Word to all with God's grace and love. Ahab was one of the most wicked and disobedient kings of Israel, walking in rebellion against God, and Elijah was tasked with speaking the truth to him. Even knowing King Ahab was evil and violent, Elijah trusted and obeyed God and spoke truth, trying to call Israel to repentance.

**OPTIONAL QUESTION:** **How might we find the correct balance of speaking truth with grace and love?** (pray first for the Holy Spirit to guide us; see people as Jesus sees them; make sure our heart and motivations are right)

# POINT 1

NOTES

## AHAB LEADS THE PEOPLE FURTHER INTO IDOLATRY (1 KINGS 16:29-34).

**29** In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. **30** And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. **31** And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. **32** He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. **33** And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. **34** In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Kings 16:29-34** from his or her Bible.

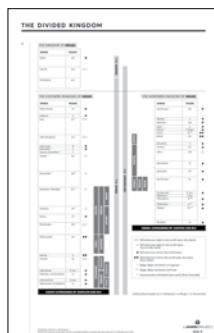
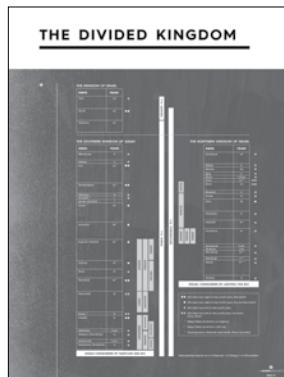
**EXPLAIN:** Use **PACK ITEMS 3 AND 4: THE DIVIDED KINGDOM (POSTER AND HANDOUT)** and the **VERSES 29-31** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG]*):

Ahab shows how sin leads to **more** sin when we **disregard** God.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 32-34** commentary to explain that God is not ignorant of evil, guilty of it, nor does He delight in it as He is patiently working for our good in spite of it (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

**ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #32: The Problem of Evil:** Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and knows everything, then evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a “**good**” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and second, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a **season**. Given what we know about God’s **character** and **purposes**, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

**DISCUSS: Why should we maintain hope when we see evil?** (we know God hates evil and will judge all; we trust He is in control; we know He has a plan)



### THE SIDONIANS

The inhabitants of the wealthy Phoenician port city of Sidon, located today in modern-day Lebanon. They were skilled ship builders and people of trade. They, like the Canaanites, worshiped Baal, who was associated as a fertility god as well as a storm god.

## COMMENTARY

**VERSES 29-31 /** Following the deaths of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, the writer of 1 Kings runs through the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah. Of the seven rulers he identifies, only one—Asa, king over Judah—did what was right (1 Kings 15:1–16:28). But the one focused on next—“**Ahab**,” king over Israel—did “**more [evil] than all who were before Him**.” Apparently the apple didn’t fall far from the tree. The same was said of Omri, his father (16:25), but Ahab surpassed even him in evil. His sins are initially described as following “**the sins of Jeroboam**.” This important connection reminds the reader of Jeroboam’s idolatry and punishment for his disobedience.

Ahab was even more evil than Omri in that he took it two steps further by marrying “**Jezebel**” and worshiping her god, “**Baal**.” This was not a coerced marriage but one Ahab chose. This woman came from the Sidonians, who were known idol-worshippers, and now the people of Israel were being led by Ahab’s example to worship Baal.

**VERSES 32-34 /** Ahab’s evil didn’t stop with the worship of Baal. He also set up an altar to worship this false god at the temple that he built for it. It is important to remember that this was actually worse than Jeroboam’s idolatry. Jeroboam created golden calves as an image for the people to worship God. This was egregious, no doubt, but Jeroboam did not lead the people to worship an entirely false god. Ahab, on the other hand, did. In competition with the shrines and high places set up for Israel’s counterfeit worship of God, Ahab set up a temple for the false god he favored. Ahab did not lead his pagan wife to worship Yahweh but instead followed her lead to worship Baal. Idolatry was rampant in Israel, and there was no sign of obedience on the horizon.

Things only got worse as there seemed to be no end to Ahab’s evil. He set up an “**Asherah**,” another object of idolatrous worship. Asherah was considered the consort of Baal. Ahab “**did more to provoke**

**the LORD**” than any other king of Israel thus far. The evil and idolatry continued to grow, making Ahab the worst king. God’s anger was justified. His people were being led to worship false gods, they were subject to the religion of a foreign, pagan woman, and they were worshiping at an altar made for Baal, a rival god that was no god.

For a human observer at the time, it would be easy to wonder if God cared or even existed with the exponential growth of idolatry in Israel. Why didn’t He stop it in its tracks? But one more act at the end of this passage once again confirmed that God will not tolerate evil and will punish those who disobey Him.

In verse 34, there is a statement that Hiel built Jericho. His oldest son died at the beginning of the work, and his youngest son died as he completed it. This passage can only be understood if the prophecy spoken through Joshua is revisited.

After Jericho was burnt to the ground and Rahab and her family were spared, Joshua made this proclamation:

Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates. (Josh. 6:26)

God warned that the city of Jericho should not be rebuilt. But under Ahab’s rule, this command was ignored, and Ahab allowed Hiel to rebuild the city. God’s word of judgment was then fulfilled as Hiel’s sons died because of his disobedience to God.

The sins of Ahab and the people of Israel had increased to the point of total idolatry and denial of the true God as they disobeyed His commands and disregarded His word. Evil was rampant as God’s people chose to disobey and walk away from the Lord. But God in His mercy would send messengers to try to bring His wayward people to repentance.

# POINT 2

NOTES

## ELIJAH LEADS THE PEOPLE TOWARD REPENTANCE (1 KINGS 18:15-21).

**15** And Elijah said, “As the **LORD** of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.” **16** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. **17** When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” **18** And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the **LORD** and followed the Baals. **19** Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” **20** So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. **21** And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the **LORD** is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Kings 18:15-21** from his or her Bible.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 15-19** commentary to highlight the following point (**the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG**):

In spite of the potential **danger**, Elijah **obeyed** God to appear before King Ahab and confront him for his sin and idolatry.

**DISCUSS:** **What are some potential dangers believers in Christ might face for obeying the Lord?** (persecution and death; imprisonment; loss of job and income; ridicule; broken relationships with friends and family)

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 20-21** commentary to emphasize the following idea (**the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG**):

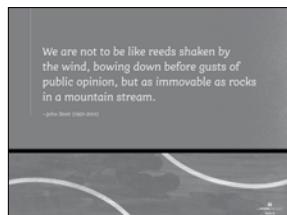
Elijah challenged the people of Israel for their **conflicting** worship in hope of bringing them to **repentance** and back to worship of the Lord.

**DISCUSS:** Read the quote on **PACK ITEM 6: IMMOVABLE ROCKS**, and then ask: **Why should believers be able to speak the truth with boldness even in the face of opposition?** (because our God is the rock in whom we find refuge and strength; we know God is in control; no matter the earthly consequences for our obedience, we have a sure hope of resurrection and glory with Jesus; because God’s Word will not return void but will accomplish its purpose)

**TRANSITION:** Elijah set out to prove who is God and to lead the people to repentance. Their divided attention would no longer stand. Either the people would walk away from God entirely to serve Baal or they would see that God alone is all-powerful and return to worship Him again.

### THE LORD OF HOSTS

This name refers to God’s role as a warrior, fighting for His people with heavenly armies or earthly ones, through spiritual and earthly battles. Since God is all-powerful and supreme, He is victorious in all He does. The name also refers to His role as the head of the divine council (Ps. 82:1; Isa. 6:1-2; 1 Kings 22:19), ruling over the assembly of angelic beings.



### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Elijah, the great prophet of God, taught that God rejects being worshiped alongside another god . . . For the Lord our God requires our entire heart, mind and soul. As such, he leaves nothing for us to give to another.”<sup>1</sup>

-Heinrich Bullinger  
(1504-1575)

## COMMENTARY

**VERSES 15-19 /** The prophet Elijah was sent by God to present himself to King Ahab and say that rain was on its way after at least two years of famine. While on the road, he met Obadiah, a high-ranking servant of Ahab and a man who feared the Lord. Elijah asked Obadiah to tell Ahab that he was there, but Obadiah, fearing Elijah might be called away, leaving Obadiah to face the wrath of Ahab alone, questioned Elijah to get some assurances that he indeed would meet Ahab. The king was already angry and ruthlessly searching for Elijah, the one who prophesied that Israel would experience a famine until he alone said otherwise (1 Kings 17:1). So Obadiah's concerns were legitimate (18:1-14). Therefore, Elijah declared by the living "**LORD of hosts**" that he would see Ahab that very day. So Obadiah went to arrange the meeting.

Even with the potential danger to his life, Elijah desired to obey the Lord and speak the truth of God for the glory of God and for the good of his people. He trusted and obeyed, hoping God's people would repent and turn back to the Lord.

When Elijah and Ahab met, the king made an immediate accusation, calling the prophet "**you troubler of Israel**" for causing the famine. From the outside, this accusation would make sense. Elijah proclaimed the famine, after all, and now all of Israel was suffering because of it. However, Elijah was not the one to blame.

Elijah's response told the truth. He stated that he was not ruining Israel, but rather, it was the disobedience of Ahab and his family. The famine was God's judgment on Ahab because of his idolatry, because Ahab had "**abandoned the commandments of the LORD**," and because he had turned to worship the false gods of Baal.

At this point, Elijah challenged Ahab's gods. Apparently between the lines of God's commission of Elijah and His promise to send rain was a call for a showdown. Elijah told Ahab to bring the entire nation to

Mount Carmel as an audience and to bring along the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah as his opponents—a battle of 850 versus 1. These prophets were closely linked with Ahab's wife, Jezebel. They were not distant prophets but close to the king and his family, friends of theirs and possibly even relatives who ate at their table.

**VERSES 20-21 /** Ahab agreed to the challenge and did what Elijah said, whether out of fear or pride. He gathered all the Israelites and prophets on Mount Carmel, a site of home-field advantage for Jezebel's team, being just outside Phoenicia, where her father was king.

There, Elijah addressed all of the nation of Israel. Speaking truth to them so that they would see their sin, He questioned them and asked "**how long**" they would waver between saying they were God's people and yet worshiping false gods. Elijah made it clear that they had to make a decision: Either the Lord is God or Baal is. Reminiscent of Joshua's call to the Israelites to abandon the gods beyond the Euphrates and the gods of the Amorites (Josh. 24:15), Elijah was trying to get Israel to renew their covenant with the one true God. The challenge would force the people to make a definitive choice. Elijah was hoping to bring them to their knees in repentance.

This challenge was met with silence, however. No one from the crowd stepped out and said, "I will follow Yahweh!" or "I will follow Baal!" It seems they were truly on the fence and didn't know which way to go, so they decided to see how the showdown went before going all in. These people were sheep without a shepherd.

But one day, the Messiah, the Christ, would come as the true leader, the Good Shepherd we all need to lead us rightly. One day, God would send His Son to lead His people on straight paths of faithfulness, obedience, and true worship.

# POINT 3

## GOD'S POWER LEADS THE PEOPLE TOWARD WORSHIP (1 KINGS 18:36-39).

**36** And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. **37** Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” **38** Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. **39** And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud **1 Kings 18:36-39** from his or her Bible.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 36-37** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Elijah's **prayer** revealed his heart for God and the **lost** people of Israel, desiring them to turn to God in **surrender** and repentance.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 38-39** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God's people saw the Lord demonstrate His **power** as the one true God, so they acknowledged and **worshiped** the Lord **alone**.

**DISCUSS:** **What are some ways we can see the power of God on display today?** (in miracles of healing and provision; in contentment in all circumstances; in the conviction of our sin and the growing desire and ability to resist temptation in favor of obedience to God; in the conversions of sinners who hear the gospel, turn from their sin, and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; in obedience to God that defies the potential consequences and dangers in this world)

**TRANSITION:** When the people saw that Yahweh is the true God and that Baal was false, they recognized their need to worship and serve the one true God. The Lord then ended the drought in Israel and brought rain. Though God demonstrated His power, Ahab and Jezebel continued to reign and do evil while Elijah and other prophets spoke for the Lord. At the end of the day, though many may try to call people back to the Lord, ultimately people must make their own choice to follow God or not. God, in His justice and mercy, does not ignore sin but gives us opportunities to return to worship Him.

## COMMENTARY

**VERSES 36-37 /** In verse 21, the people of Israel did not answer Elijah when he set before them the choice to follow God or follow Baal. Elijah then proposed a test to see who is the real God. He told the people gathered on Mount Carmel that the contestants would have two altars. The 450 prophets of Baal would preside over one while Elijah, the lone prophet of the Lord, would preside over the other. Each side would prepare a sacrifice and set it on the altar but not light the fire. Then the participants would call upon their deity, and the one who answered with fire upon the altar would be the one true God, and they all agreed (1 Kings 18:22-24).

The prophets of Baal went first and spent hours praying to their god, asking for a demonstration of his power. They even cut themselves, as was their custom. Yet nothing happened to their altar. They were answered with silence (18:25-29).

Then it was Elijah's turn to demonstrate whether or not Yahweh is the one true God. Trying to give himself a disadvantage, as well as to display the power of his God, he commanded that water be poured all over the sacrifice and the wood on the altar (18:30-35).

Then Elijah uttered a brief prayer in stark contrast to the begging and pleading of the prophets before him. Though the prayer was not hours long, each word was full of truth and purpose.

First, he prayed to Yahweh and described who his God is—“**God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.**” This was important because of who was surrounding Elijah. The entire nation of Israel, all descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel), were present. Elijah was praying to the God of Israel’s forefathers, reminding the people of the covenants He had made with them to follow Him.

Second, the prayer included Elijah’s petition that Yahweh make it known that He is God and that Elijah was His “**servant.**”

Elijah prayed that the people would recognize that he was sent from God and that everything he did was out of obedience to the Lord.

Finally, Elijah pleaded for the Lord to “**answer**” his prayer so that the people would know Yahweh is God and that they would return to Him. The ultimate thrust of Elijah’s prayer was not that he would look good or wise to the people of Israel but that the people would repent and have their hearts restored to God. The purpose of a plea for God’s power should be repentance and reconciliation.

**VERSES 38-39 /** Now the moment of truth. Would Yahweh stay as silent as Baal had done? Of course not!

After Elijah’s prayer, the offering was completely “**consumed**” by fire falling from the sky. The author of 1 Kings spelled out the result in detail: Not only was the offering consumed but every single part of what had stood before the people—the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water—was destroyed in the fire. This was an undeniable sign that Elijah’s prayer had been answered. The flames were so strong, they even consumed stones, which normally cannot be turned to ash. This was a fire from above, unlike anything on earth.

The contrast could not have been greater between Yahweh and Baal. The prayers of the prophets of Baal produced not a spark, not a whisper, nothing. No matter how loud they were or earnestly they pleaded or how deeply they cut themselves, nothing was enough to get their dead god to listen or to answer.

The people of Israel immediately responded to this demonstration of Yahweh’s power with humility, fear, and awe because they had seen who is truly God. They fell down and proclaimed: “**The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.**” There was no doubt in the minds of the people anymore. Yahweh alone is God, and their worship was now turned back toward Him.

# MY RESPONSE

Because Christ suffered and died on our behalf, we rely on God for the strength we need to deliver His message no matter the hardships we may face.

NOTES

## HEAD:

If we are not consistently evaluating our lives and looking to see if there is any sin and disobedience, we may find ourselves deeper in sin than we thought we were. Often sin can begin with a simple thought that seems harmless, but left unchecked, our thoughts can increase. We can begin to dwell on evil things, and soon enough, our thoughts can become actions. Our goal ought to be to take our thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5) and to plead that God would help us think about what is good and holy more than we think about anything else.

**What consistent sinful thoughts are you struggling with, and how will you take those thoughts captive, replacing them with truth?**

## HEART:

Sometimes our hearts can be pulled in two different directions. We want to lose weight, but we also want cake. We want to obey God, but we also love our sin. It can bring about much turmoil and despair when we are divided in what we love and what we desire. God is not surprised by a divided heart. He knows us intimately and knows that we are sinful people who cannot be perfect in our affections. This is why we can rest in knowing that Jesus did not have a divided heart and loved God perfectly. We can cling to Jesus as our hope when we find ourselves struggling to love God well.

**How will you pray for yourself so that your affections for the Lord may grow?**

## HANDS:

When Elijah prayed for God to demonstrate His power, he also prayed that the people would turn back to God and know Him again. This prayer is an example to us. Instead of praying only that things would go our way, we can pray that sin would cease, that repentance would take place, and that others would come to know God through our answered prayers. This is a reshaping of our typical approach to prayer, but focusing prayers on others creates humility and love in us.

**How will you pray today for people who do not know the Lord as the one true God?**

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"False gods push us to mutilate ourselves because we desperately want to win their approval. But only one God was ever mutilated for us—Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

-J. D. Greear

# EXTRA

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## POINT 1: AHAB LEADS THE PEOPLE FURTHER INTO IDOLATRY (1 KINGS 16:29-34).

### + COMMENTARY

"The most sinful of Israel's kings, Ahab, will have to reckon with the most powerful of prophetic interventions, in the shape of Elijah. God will certainly act, even if on a timescale that is slightly different than hitherto."<sup>3</sup>

### + COMMENTARY

"Ahab succeeds his father with the kingdom in the best shape since Jeroboam's times. He rules for twenty-two years (ca. 874–853), but few if any of these years please the author, who condemns Ahab as the worst northern king yet. Ahab not only allows Jeroboam's cult to continue, but he also marries Jezebel of Tyre, a Baal worshiper. Jezebel becomes the great patroness of Baal in Israel."<sup>4</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATION

A common climax for many movies is when the villain and the hero finally meet face to face. Just when the villain thought everything was going according to plan, when he felt confident in his own success, when he was moments away from conquering whatever he set out to do, the hero appears. This moment occurs when all hope is lost and the outcome seems bleak. Right then, the one who will save the day appears and confronts the villain.

This is much like what happened with Ahab and Elijah. Ahab was walking in his sin without a care in the world. He was pursuing his own agenda without any care for what the rest of the world was doing. His plans were frustrated by the famine in the land, but still he moved forward in his disobedience. Then Elijah comes face to face with the king. For the first time, the most evil king faces God's own servant. What a climactic moment in the narrative! The idolatry of Ahab will not overcome the faithfulness of Elijah.

It doesn't always feel this way, but good always conquers evil in the end. There is no doubt that God and His people will overcome all evil.

# EXTRA

## POINT 2: ELIJAH LEADS THE PEOPLE TOWARD REPENTANCE (1 KINGS 18:15-21).

### + COMMENTARY

"Ahab calls Elijah the 'troubler of Israel.' Indirectly, at least, Ahab feels that the famine has been all Elijah's fault; because of Elijah's hostile attitude, Baal has been angered and so has withheld rain for the past three years. Elijah's reply is particularly instructive. Not he, but Ahab and his family are the real troublemakers, for they have made Baal worship the state religion (v. 18)."<sup>5</sup>

### + COMMENTARY

"The choice of Mount Carmel is significant as the center for the worship of a local deity that functioned as Canaanite Baal. Its proximity to the Phoenician border places the challenge to Jezebel right at her doorstep. The luxurious valley in the area of Carmel is a natural place for the worship of a fertility god (cf. Amos 1:2). The plain of Acco drains two rivers, the Na'aman and the Kishon, which supply the area with a heavy layer of rich topsoil from the erosion of the Galilean highlands, providing for plenteous agricultural productivity. The much narrower plain of Dor to the south is blanketed with a thicket-like forest. Carmel is also the natural place to worship the storm god who can calm the winter gales and turn the storms into rain."<sup>6</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATION

In the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde retells the classic myth of Narcissus (where we get the word narcissism from). In the novel, a young, handsome man named Dorian has a picture of himself commissioned. Dorian becomes obsessed with this painting and destroys his life because he loves this image of himself. He does not realize that he has become his own enemy and will not listen to anyone who tells him the truth.

Ahab's story of self-indulgence is similar to that of Dorian. Instead of taking responsibility for his sin and admitting that he had disobeyed God, Ahab blamed Elijah for the struggles of the nation of Israel. Ahab's problems were anyone's fault but his own. He could not see that he was the one to blame for the famine. Our idolatry and selfishness is often something we are not able to recognize. This is because sin is powerful and corrupts the soul. Yet those who are in Christ have freedom and power over sin, selfishness, and idolatry. When we are tempted to focus only on our own needs and desires, and even when we succumb to sin and do not uphold God's expectations, we do not look to ourselves as savior. Rather, we have the blessing of salvation through Jesus. We look to Him to remove our sinfulness and to help us be obedient to God.

## POINT 3: GOD'S POWER LEADS THE PEOPLE TOWARD WORSHIP (1 KINGS 18:36-39).

### + COMMENTARY

"If this offering is consumed in fire, it must be the LORD! Having done all this, Elijah simply prays. No dancing, or shouting, or self-mutilation—simply a prayer. No all-day ritual to manipulate the deity into action—simply a few words over a speedily-prepared offering at the time of

sacrifice (vv. 29,36), requesting an “answer” . . . But Elijah has the ear of a living God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob), who has responded to Elijah’s prayers before (17:17–24). The fire of the LORD falls—and it consumes not only the sacrifice but everything else around it, whether inflammable stones or soaking soil (v. 38). The LORD—he is God!”<sup>7</sup>

## + COMMENTARY

“The ‘fire from God’ anticipates the advance of the rain. The fiery apparition indicates the divine presence (cf. Ex. 3:2; 19:18; 24:17). Fire also attests the divine acceptance and approval of the sacrifice (1 Chron. 21:26). Fire may indicate both approval of the sacrifice and the divine presence, as with Gideon (Judg. 6:20–22) and Moses (Lev. 9:22–24). The actions of Elijah signal the restoration of Israel. An altar of twelve stones (v. 31) and twelve dousings with water (four jars emptied three times) both recall the twelve tribes and the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 4:1–7,19–24). Building an altar, forsaking false gods, and restoring the name Israel (1 Kings 18:30–31) follow the pattern of Jacob when he built the altar at Bethel (Gen. 35:1–9). The Carmel event is no less significant than the Exodus; the renewal of Israel does not allow for the continuance of Baalism (1 Kings 18:40).”<sup>8</sup>

## + ILLUSTRATION

God’s power displayed is an incredible thing. In the Old Testament, there are many stories like this one in 1 Kings in which God demonstrates His power in incredible ways. His power is often what makes people repent of their sins and turn to Him. Today, we don’t seem to see blatant miracles and displays of God’s power like the Old Testament examples. But God still demonstrates His power and miracles today. We don’t hear of all-consuming flames that obliterate wood, stone, sacrifice, and water that prove God is Lord of all. Instead, we hear sinners profess faith in Christ and we see sinners display a resurrection in their baptism and obedience all because of the telling of the most powerful, most miraculous event in all of history that can lead even the most idolatrous hearts back toward God—the gospel story of salvation through Jesus Christ. In Jesus’s life, He performed many miracles proving that He is the promised Son of God. These are not the most noteworthy thing Jesus did, however. He lived a perfect life, never sinning and never coming up short. Jesus died on a cross, taking the full weight of sin upon His shoulders. He was buried, and three days later, He rose from the dead. This is the most powerful, most miraculous act in all of history. Jesus laid down His life for us and was raised to life, conquering death and defeating sin. Nothing is more powerful than this, and this leads people to worship!

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