

AHAB'S IDOLATRY



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

1 Kings 15–18

+ **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.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Kings 15:25–16:34

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Kings 16:33

NOTES



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).

God’s anger can sometimes be difficult to understand. We know God is loving and kind. The first verse many of us memorized was John 3:16, about God loving the world so much that He sent His Son to give us life. But God can still express anger.

Anger is not an emotion we regularly view in a positive light. We see anger as something to avoid and something that is inherently wrong. Yet anger is just a neutral emotion that can cause us to sin or lead us to righteousness. Even Scripture says we can be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26).

So God can be angry and not sin because He is angered by sin. God is perfect, holy, and just, so when He is angry, He is always angry about the right things and He always acts in accordance to His righteous character. We, on the other hand, many times react in sin when we are angry, thus portraying anger in more of a negative light.

God’s anger is righteous. This means that He has every right to be angry. Because God is perfect and holy, He hates sin. Watching His people disobey and rebel angers Him. Here, Ahab’s idolatry and sinfulness provoked God to anger, not because God hated Ahab but because God hates sin.

Understanding that God hates our sin and our sin angers Him should encourage us to avoid sin and seek to walk in obedience to God. This should also encourage us to know that God cares about justice in the world, and as we see evil, we know God will one day make all things right again. He has a perfect plan that we can’t always see, but we can trust in His righteousness, goodness, and justice.

Fortunately for us as believers, by God’s grace, even when He is angered by our sin, the blood of Jesus covers our sin and God looks on us with love.

How should understanding God’s anger change how you think about your sin?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Kings 17:1–18:21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Kings 18:21

NOTES

“How long?” Elijah asks. How long will the Israelites go back and forth between two choices: obey the one true God or obey other gods?

Let 1 Kings 18:21 sit with you for a few minutes. Think about your life, your choices, your beliefs, and your actions. None of us are spiritually balanced. We do not follow God perfectly, and we let other loves get in the way of our loving God. It may not be obvious to us that we are wavering between two opinions. This is why we need discerning questions that help us evaluate if we are drifting from our devotion to the Lord.

Sometimes we can ask ourselves these questions, but often we need the church, someone outside of ourselves to look in and ask us what we believe and where we might be coming up short.

When we analyze our hearts, when we see the places we are wavering, we may be tempted to remain seated on the fence. It is easy to convince ourselves that our sin is not too big of a deal. It is easy to believe that we’ll stop sinning tomorrow, but right now it is okay. Elijah made it clear to the people of Israel—you either follow God or you do not. There is no in-between option.

If you have shared the gospel with someone who grew up Hindu, you know that when they hear about Jesus, they often want to add Him to their list of hundreds of gods they might worship. They like what Jesus says and does, so they’re just going to add Him to a group of idols to worship.

Jesus cannot sit on the shelf with other gods. He is either Lord of the universe who conquered death or He is not. But you must be the one to choose, and there is a right and wrong answer to this test.

In what areas of your life are you wavering between two opinions, struggling to let Jesus be Lord?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Kings 18:22-46

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Kings 18:36-39

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Elijah didn't pray so that people would think he was a great prophet or talk about his power. He didn't pray in order for his church to grow. He asked God to answer him so the people would know that the Lord was Yahweh, the Lord God."¹

-Michael Catt

All-consuming fire.

Nothing in the path of the Lord's fire existed once the flames touched the ground. What marvelous and overwhelming power! We don't see acts of God like this today, but we do see the power of the Lord at work in changing lives and capturing hearts.

This evidence that Elijah prayed for was not so he would be proven right but so the people would return to the Lord. This example can shape the way we share the gospel. Think of a time you have shared the gospel with a friend, coworker, family member, or stranger. What was your motivation? Was it out of a desire to see the person consumed with the Holy Spirit and made obedient to Jesus, or was it for selfish reasons?

Elijah's prayer can be ours as well. We need to pray that others may know God and turn their hearts back to Him.

We have a God who answers prayers. Sharing the gospel can be scary and even frustrating at times. Yet if we truly love our neighbors—any other fellow human (Luke 10:29-37)—then praying that they would come to know the Lord is the most loving thing you could ever do for them. We are a cynical and doubting people. We sometimes struggle to believe that God really will answer our prayers. But He does! He answers our prayers and He saves sinners from the clutches of death.

Not only can God rain down all-consuming fire, He is consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Because of Jesus Christ, we have new hope and new life and our lives become a living sacrifice to Him, our spiritual act of worship (Rom. 12:1). He desires that all would come to Him offering their lives in worship and sacrifice to the one true God.

How might the way you share the gospel change if your prayers were similar to Elijah's?

DAY 4

READ:

John 15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 15:18-21

NOTES

Persecution is difficult for most Americans to understand. Most of us do not face beatings, public humiliation, or death for our obedience to Jesus. However, we can at least understand that the world hates us. If we believe that marriage is a God-ordained covenant between one man and one woman, then there are people who hate us for that belief. If we believe that abortion is the destruction of human life and not a removal of a clump of cells, then there are people who will hate us. In a conversation with just about any non-Christian, you will find some belief that you hold that they hate.

Yet we are often surprised by this as if Jesus did not tell us to expect it and that it was promised. We cannot expect America as a whole to hold the same values and beliefs that we do. America, just like many other parts of the world, is made up of some who follow Jesus and some who do not.

Personal offense at the world hating you is a misunderstanding of the path of the Christian. The world hates us as the world hated Jesus. His followers should not be surprised that they experience similar things to what He experienced on earth.

Previously, we read that Ahab hated Elijah because he brought a message from God that was negative. But Elijah continued to be faithful and bring the word of the Lord. We can remember to be like Elijah.

It is an honor to walk in the path of the Messiah. We can walk forward with confidence knowing that if we experience hatred from the world for our obedience to Scripture, we are walking directly behind Jesus, following in His footsteps, and that is exactly where we should be.

How should expecting the world to hate you for your obedience to Scripture change the way you view and interact with the world?

DAY 5

READ:

Romans 12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Romans 12:17-21

NOTES

Responding to evil with good may be one of the most countercultural reactions one could give.

In a viral video, Shelby Houston spoke about her father, who was killed in the line of duty as a police officer. Her stunning eulogy demonstrates some of the most shocking grace you could expect.

Shelby forgave the man who killed her father and stated that she prayed that he would know Jesus. This response demonstrated Shelby's complete trust that it is God's responsibility to avenge her father's death. She did not desire to kill this man or see him suffer. Rather, she longed to see him repent and know the Lord.

When someone does something evil against us, it is natural to want to respond equally and give payback for what has been done. But we can trust the Lord to repay evil in a perfect and holy way. Only God is God; we are not. Vengeance belongs to God alone (Rom. 12:19).

Knowing that God has forgiven us over and over again should motivate us to learn to forgive others who have wronged us. It's easy to sin and ask God for forgiveness. It's not so easy when sinned against to forgive. But with God's help and strength through prayer, we can know we can overcome evil with good.

Our calling as believers is to love our enemies and care for them. When believers are able to forgive those who sin against them, and leave vengeance to the Lord, we might just find more people being drawn to the Lord and His love and mercy.

When in your life have you chosen to love your enemies and treat them with kindness instead of repaying their evil? How did you see God at work in that instance?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Ahab leads the people further into idolatry (1 Kings 16:29-34).

Ahab shows how sin leads to _____ sin when we _____ God.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #32: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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? *Why should we maintain hope when we see evil?*

POINT 2: Elijah leads the people toward repentance (1 Kings 18:15-21).

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

? *What are some potential dangers believers in Christ might face for obeying the Lord?*

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.”²

–Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)

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



Why should believers be able to speak the truth with boldness even in the face of opposition?

POINT 3: God's power leads the people toward worship (1 Kings 18:36-39).

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

God's people saw the Lord demonstrate His _____ as the one true God, so they acknowledged and _____ the Lord _____ .



What are some ways we can see the power of God on display today?

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.

- **HEAD:** What consistent sinful thoughts are you struggling with, and how will you take those thoughts captive, replacing them with truth?
- **HEART:** How will you pray for yourself so that your affections for the Lord may grow?
- **HANDS:** How will you pray today for people who do not know the Lord as the one true God?

NOTES

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."³

—J. D. Greear