

(1 Kings 18:17-19) - After the death of Solomon the kingdom of Israel was divided into the southern kingdom called Judah (consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the northern kingdom called Israel (sometimes Ephraim, consisting of the other ten tribes). The northern kingdom was marked with idolatry, and none of its kings were godly men who led the people in the true worship of the Lord God. Ahab was one in a line of evil kings in Israel's history and who *"did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him"* (1 Kings 16:30). Among the events in Ahab's life that led to his downfall was his marriage to an evil woman named Jezebel who had a particular hatred for God's people (1 Kings 18:4). Because of his marriage to this pagan woman, Ahab devoted himself to the worship of the false gods Baal and Asherah in Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33).

God sent His prophet, Elijah the Tishbite, to confront Ahab and predict God's judgment upon the northern kingdom by drought (1 Kings 17:1). Instead of seeing this as God's righteous judgment against his evil and repenting of his sins, Ahab blamed Elijah for bringing trouble on Israel (1 Kings 18:17-18). This is often the way unbelievers view God's preachers when they state God's message of judgment against sin and idolatry. The Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ and based upon His righteousness alone is an offense to sinners who are entrenched in false refuges of salvation by human works and/or will (John 3:19-20; Matt. 5:20; 15:10-14; Luke 16:14-15; Acts 7:54-60; Gal. 4:16). The truth of salvation all of grace in Christ leaves men with no room to glory in themselves and exposes all hopes but Christ and His righteousness to be in vain and to be no more than dung (Php. 3:7-9).

(1 Kings 18:20-22) - Elijah called on Ahab to send for 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the groves to Mt. Carmel and challenged them to call on their gods. Elijah was obviously in the minority. False prophets have always outnumbered God's true prophets. Christ described this when He spoke of the strait gate and narrow way that leads to eternal life in contrast with the wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction. He said of the way of death, *"many there be which go in thereat"* (Matt. 7:13), and of the way of eternal life, *"few there be that find it"* (Matt. 7:14). Throughout Israel's history, the majority of the people forsook the Lord and His truth, but in each generation there was always a remnant of sinners saved by God's grace who trusted and serve the Lord (ex. Isa. 1:9). Later on, Elijah lamented that he was the only one left to serve the Lord, but the Lord told him that there were 7000 in Israel whom the Lord had reserved by His grace and had not forsaken Him for Baal (1 Kings 19:9-19; cf. Rom. 11:1-6). Many people see this sad truth as a discouragement for seeking the Lord. But God promises that ALL who seek Him according to His Word, and ALL who call upon Him shall be saved (Isa. 55:6-11; Rom. 10:13-17). Christ said, *"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"* (John 6:37). The problem is that none of us by nature will seek Him or come to Him unless we are drawn by God (John 6:44-45). And the evidence of being drawn by God to Christ is a sincere desire to seek, know, and find the truth of the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ.

Elijah posed a very important question - *"How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him."* It is impossible to trust, worship, and serve the living and true God with a divided mind and divided loyalties (Luke 16:13; cf. Matt. 6:24). God will not share His glory with idols. The question posed by Elijah to the people commands faith in the one living and true God as He reveals Himself in the one true Savior, Jesus Christ, and repentance from all idols (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Php. 3:3-9; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:9). Both faith in Christ and true repentance are gifts from God that brings His people to Christ for all salvation and brings them to turn away from and forsake all idols and all other ways of salvation.

(1 Kings 18:23-25) - Elijah told them to bring two bullocks to lay upon the altar. He told the false prophets to call upon their god, and he would call on the name of the Lord - *“and the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God”* (1 Kings 18:19-24). The people then answered, *“It is well spoken.”* He told them to take their bullock, dress it, and call upon the name of their god, *“but put no fire under”* it. Fire would come down to consume the sacrifice if their god was real.

(1 Kings 18:26-29) - These verses show the failure of the false prophets to call down fire from heaven from an idol. Their prayers to their god lasted *“from morning even until noon.”* *“They leaped upon the altar,”* while Elijah stood by and *“mocked them”* (1 Kings 18:27). The false prophets continued crying aloud to their god. They *“cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them”* (1 Kings 18:28). And when they were finished *“there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded”* (1 Kings 18:29). It was spiritually dead sinners praying to a dead god. This proves that the length of prayers, sincerity, and religious activity do not mean salvation and truth (Rom. 10:1-4). All who seek salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life and glory by their works or their decisions worship a false god who cannot save. The living and true God is One Who saves His people by grace and mercy based on His justice satisfied by the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God’s elect. Christ’s righteousness imputed to His people, that righteousness which He by Himself worked out in His death on the cross for them, insures the complete and eternal salvation of all for whom He died and arose again from the dead (Isa. 45:20-25). To serve a god who saves and accepts sinners in any other way on any other ground is idolatry.

(1 Kings 18:30-38) - Elijah then took twelve stones, representing Israel and spiritually representing God’s elect. He built an altar in the name of the LORD (the God of creation, providence, and salvation, all by His grace through Christ Who is our Altar and our Sacrifice). He dug a trench around the altar, put wood under the bullock which had been cut in pieces, symbolizing the death of the substitute, because without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. Elijah told them to take four barrels of water and pour them upon the sacrifice and the wood. He repeated this twice so that the water drenched the altar, the wood, and filled the trench. Elijah was not trying to be elaborate. He simply wanted them to see that the sacrifice could be consumed only by the power of God. Elijah then prayed a sixty-three word prayer (1 Kings 18:36-37). This prayer was aimed at repentance in turning the people back to God. Only the Lord God could accomplish this. *“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench”* (1 Kings 18:38).

(1 Kings 18:39-40) - The LORD brought the people to repentance - *“The LORD, He is the God; the LORD, He is the God.”* The prophets of Baal were then executed under the righteous judgment of God, proving that without the proper substitute and sacrifice, there is only death because of sins. All of this shows how much that we as sinners need God’s grace in Christ Who is the one and only proper Substitute and Sacrifice for the sins of spiritual Israel (God’s elect). There is one true God and one true Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ Who has saved His people from their sins and brings them all to glory by His grace.