

SESSION 1

The God Who Answers with Fire

Summary and Goal

On Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah demonstrated the stark contrast between the demand placed on our lives by pursuing false idols and the resources God provides for us to pursue our relationship with Him. In the end, one pursuit leaves us bled out and used up; the other pursuit builds us back up and ministers to us so we can minister to others.

Main Passage

1 Kings 18:17-39

Session Outline

1. The God who answers with fire is deserving of our loyalty (1 Kings 18:17-24).
2. The God who answers with fire is different from false gods (1 Kings 18:25-29).
3. The God who answers with fire is destined to receive glory (1 Kings 18:30-39).

Theological Theme

False gods demand strenuous effort and sacrifice, but the true God is known by His grace and power.

Christ Connection

The prophets of Baal danced and slashed themselves before the altar, thinking they must bleed in order to express their devotion. But the true God is different than false gods like Baal. He expressed His devotion to us by sending His Son—Jesus Christ—who bled and died for us so that we could receive His grace through faith.

Missional Application

God calls us not to hesitate or be hindered by idolatry but to join in His mission of turning people's hearts back to Him.

Date of My Bible Study: _____

Session Plan

The God Who Answers with Fire

Session 1

Pack Item 1: Prophets and Kings

Display this poster in a place that will help group members follow the storyline of Scripture, to remember where we've been and where we are going.

Point 1 Option

Who was the god Baal? Enlist a volunteer early in the week to give a brief report about the pagan god when the group meets. Consider providing the *Biblical Illustrator* article "The Allure of Baal" for the volunteer's research.

(This article is available through the *Biblical Illustrator* online digital bundle for *The Gospel Project*; it is also available as a sample article on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*.)

Pack Item 2: The Divided Kingdom Map

Mount Carmel is highlighted on this map if you wish to point it out to your group.

Introduction

Start by noting that most of us wouldn't categorize ourselves as idol worshippers. Use the illustration of fishing lines getting entangled to help people see that it is easier to place people or things before our Lord than we think [*consider bringing in a fishing pole with a tangled line as a visual*] (leader p. 10; personal study guide [PSG] p. 10).

- What are some false ideas or worthless activities that can "entangle" the Christian?
- What are the signs that we are exerting energy and effort on pointless things?

Briefly use **Pack Item 2: The Divided Kingdom Map**, **Pack Item 10: The Divided Kingdom**, and the "Historical Context" sidebar to help your group understand this time in Israel's history in relation to the storyline of Scripture (leader p. 10). Then summarize the session (leader p. 10; PSG p. 11).

1. The God who answers with fire is deserving of our loyalty (1 Kings 18:17-24).

Read 1 Kings 18:17-24, and explain the spiritual disloyalty that existed under Ahab's reign (leader pp. 11-12; PSG pp. 11-12).

- What are some of the things that attract a person's loyalty in our current culture, thus compromising their loyalty to God?
- Why is it difficult for people in our society to be loyal to God?

Highlight the irony of Ahab's accusation against Elijah ("troubler of Israel"). *Reference Elijah's prophecy of a famine on Pack Item 4: Elijah and Elisha as God's judgment on the king's and people's idolatry.* Then note why God deserves loyalty—He is the true God of grace and power, the One who would answer with fire and give His people a chance to turn back to Him (leader p. 12; PSG p. 12).

- Based on Elijah's challenge for how the true God would be known, what can we learn about God and His plan?

2. The God who answers with fire is different from false gods (1 Kings 18:25-29).

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Kings 18:25-29. Point out the wasted time and effort by the prophets of Baal to provoke their god to action. The true God, however, invests in us so we can invest in others (leader pp. 13-14; PSG pp. 13-14).

- What are some “false gods” in our day that consume our time and effort (in reference to both Christians and non-Christians)?
- How and why do these idols take so much of our time and effort?

Show the vast difference between false gods and the true God by contrasting how the prophets pursued their god versus how Elijah pursued God: religion and rituals versus *trust* (leader p. 14; PSG p. 14).

- How can Christians strike a balance between devoting time and effort to things of this world that are practical responsibilities (work, caretaking, parenting), things that are for pleasure, and things that are purposeful toward building relationship with God?

3. The God who answers with fire is destined to receive glory (1 Kings 18:30-39).

Read 1 Kings 18:30-35, and highlight the significance of Elijah having to repair the altar to the Lord (leader p. 15; PSG p. 15).

- Why is it that we establish other altars when we neglect our relationship with God?
- What do these altars communicate about who or what we are devoted to?

Note the purpose of the water poured over the altar; then read 1 Kings 18:36-39. Contrary to the prophets of Baal, Elijah simply prayed for God to receive glory, and the God who is for us answered with fire (leader pp. 15-17; PSG pp. 15-16).

- How would you explain the difference between sacrificing your life to a false god and allowing God’s sacrifice to give you life?

Conclusion

Let’s examine our lives for false gods and ask God to show them to us so we can be freed from them and free to engage in His mission of turning hearts back to Him (leader p. 17; PSG p. 17). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 18).

Point 2 Option

Ask groups of 2-3 to identify a couple of scenarios involving repeated actions without achieving success (ex. attempting to start a car with a low battery). Then ask the groups to describe the thoughts and emotions associated with those scenarios. Allow the groups a moment to share their conclusions with the large group. Then connect their comments with the actions and results of the prophets who were trying to get Baal’s attention.

? For Further Discussion

How might reminding yourself daily of the gospel help you fight the temptation to worship other things?

Christ Connection: The prophets of Baal danced and slashed themselves before the altar, thinking they must bleed in order to express their devotion. But the true God is different than false gods like Baal. He expressed His devotion to us by sending His Son—Jesus Christ—who bled and died for us so that we could receive His grace through faith.

Missional Application: God calls us not to hesitate or be hindered by idolatry but to join in His mission of turning people’s hearts back to Him.

Expanded Session Content

The God Who Answers with Fire

Session 1

Voices from Church History

“An idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hand.”¹

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

Historical Context

The previous volume of *The Gospel Project Chronological* covered the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Solomon did not end his life and reign well, allowing, sanctioning, and even participating in idolatrous worship. As a consequence, God split the kingdom, taking most of the tribes away from Solomon's son. Now there were two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (in which the line of David continued on the throne). Some kings in Judah followed in the path of David, but most did not, and only one king in Israel has any positive assessment of his reign. King Ahab in Israel was one of the most wicked kings in their history, spurred on by his idolatrous, pagan wife, Jezebel.

Introduction

As a kid, my husband loved to fish. I once asked him what happens when two fishing lines get entangled. He told me that even though the two lines eventually could be disentangled, it sometimes took so much effort that it was better to just cut the line, tie on a new hook, and start over. He also told me that even one line could get tangled up with itself.

What leads to tangled fishing lines? Well, you can put the line on your reel improperly, you can use the wrong kind of line, or you can set the drag incorrectly. Plus, a line can get tangled because of the way the person casts, the kind of equipment that is utilized, etc. If a person struggles against the line by thrashing about and pulling harder, the problem of entanglement only gets worse!

Sometimes our lives are like fishing lines—easily entangled in a myriad of false ideas and worthless activities, leading us to exertion that demands our time and effort. And too often our struggle against falsehood can consume us and take us deeper into the entanglement.

- ❓ What are some false ideas or worthless activities that can “entangle” the Christian?
- ❓ What are the signs that we are exerting energy and effort on pointless things?

As we continue our journey through the biblical storyline, we arrive at a time in Israel's history when God revealed His character to His people in a number of ways. God is not hiding; He loves to reveal Himself. In the events we will study and the people we will encounter, we will see the characteristics of our loving and powerful God on display.

Session Summary

In this session we see how the prophet Elijah demonstrated the stark contrast between the demand placed on our lives by pursuing false idols and the resources God provides for us to pursue our relationship with Him. In the end, one pursuit leaves us bled out and used up; the other pursuit builds us back up and ministers to us so we can minister to others.

1. The God who answers with fire is deserving of our loyalty (1 Kings 18:17-24).

As a young Christian, when I first read the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, I thought, *The Israelites must have been shallow to have fallen so easily into worship of Baal, a pagan god! Modern Christians, who have thousands of years of Jewish and Christian writings at their fingertips, are so much better educated and informed. We'd never fall into such a trap!* Now I realize that people today are not that different from people thousands of years ago, especially when it comes to human disloyalty to God.

One reason Christians may be disloyal to God is the skepticism in our culture regarding truth. As Christian philosopher Dallas Willard poignantly remarked, “We live in an age in which it is considered a virtue to disbelieve and a vice to believe.”²

We have become so skeptical that we think the intelligent person is the one who constantly questions everything. Our society’s intellectual wavering had led us into accepting a pluralistic view of religious beliefs, such as, “All religions are equally true.” Elijah dealt with a similar problem when the Israelites wavered in their response to a question about their loyalty and faith in Yahweh as the true God.

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. ²² Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. ²³ Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. ²⁴ And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”

Further Commentary

“Despite Ahab’s bravery and abilities in many areas, his accusation against Elijah showed that willful sin can blind a person to reality. Elijah immediately took the conversation to the crucial issue—Ahab’s disobedience of God. Then Elijah issued his challenge to set up a carefully planned and publicized power encounter pitting Elijah against the prophets of Baal and his consort, Asherah. Asherah is a generic name for any divine consort of any fertility god, but is also sometimes a title or name for a particular goddess. From the course of events, we can see that some of the worshipers of Baal really believed in the power of their deity and that many who should have followed the Lord did not have much faith. Therefore, for many of the observers, this was a genuine open-ended power encounter to discover which deity was stronger. Elijah then proposed the terms of the test: whichever god miraculously ignited and burned his sacrifice would prove to be the true deity who was worthy of the people’s allegiance. Since Baal was the storm god, his followers believed he could answer with fire (lightning). But this encounter would show which deity really controlled the weather and provided what the people needed. At the same time, it would show who was a destroyer of Israel, rebellious Ahab or the Lord’s prophet Elijah.”³

—Andrew C. Bowling,
HCSB Study Bible

Further Commentary

Relativism: the belief that different things are true, right, etc., for different people or at different times.⁴

For a more in-depth discussion on relativism in its various forms, see *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism.

Voices from Church History

“We are not to be like reeds shaken by the wind, bowing down before gusts of public opinion, but as immovable as rocks in a mountain stream.”⁵

—John Stott (1921–2011)

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions?” Elijah asked. The Israelites, the people who should have adamantly opposed giving their loyalty to false gods, gave no answer. Their lack of response revealed their unfaithful hearts and minds. Beginning with King Solomon’s allowance of foreign religious and cultural influences and all the way down to the kingship of Ahab, the Israelite people had gradually strayed from the worship of God.

Under King Ahab, the spiritual drought was so dire that his pagan consort, Queen Jezebel, actively and openly persecuted the prophets of God. The persecution of God’s prophets came from the governing house of the Northern Kingdom of Israel! It is no wonder that God allowed the land to suffer a physical drought reflective of Israel’s great spiritual disloyalty (1 Kings 17:1).

- ❓ What are some of the things that attract a person’s loyalty in our current culture, thus compromising their loyalty to God?
- ❓ Why is it difficult for people in our society to be loyal to God?

The people had strayed so far from the worship of the true God that King Ahab actually blamed Elijah as the troubler or destroyer of their nation! Elijah, in unwavering loyalty to God, would not bow down to but openly opposed the worship of the pagan storm/fertility god Baal. And so, Elijah was blamed for attracting Baal’s wrath. Ahab—the leader of the nation that was explicitly told to have “no other gods”—had gone so far astray that he could no longer recognize the problem of “having another god.”

Even today, people may blame Christians for any number of problems in society: *You Christians are the problem since you won’t worship at the altar at which we worship—the altar of relativism. You are the bigoted and hateful ones in our society (i.e., troublers, destroyers).*

But just as we see with Elijah, the real problem is our society’s spiritual disloyalty, which ultimately leads to spiritual drought and destruction. We constantly look for peace and love and grace of our own design and in our own power. Yet no matter how strong our belief, we cannot hope to find an answer in the worship of things of our own design. Only the true God, full of grace and power, provides the answer we seek.

Elijah stated in his challenge that the true God is the One who answers. Here we find an important reason why God deserves our loyalty in worship, even when our society adamantly opposes us. God not only demonstrated His ultimate power but also His ultimate grace by providing Israel a chance to turn back to Him. Yahweh is deserving of loyalty as the true God of grace and power.

- ❓ Based on Elijah’s challenge for how the true God would be known, what can we learn about God and His plan?

2. The God who answers with fire is different from false gods (1 Kings 18:25-29).

The test of the true God has been set by Elijah and accepted by King Ahab and the people of Israel. “The people were trying to hold together two mutually exclusive loyalties. But this was impossible. It was time to choose. The Lord and Baal could not both be the true God.”⁶ And so, the contest took place on Mount Carmel, a noted high place of worship of Baal. The sacrificial bulls were chosen, the altars built, and the contest commenced.



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Elke Eitel / Hans-Peter Klut. / Art Resource, NY

²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.”²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer

us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Though it may seem like a spectacle to modern readers, the prophets of Baal created a *common* pagan worship scene to evoke the empathy of their god. Notice the effort put forth by the prophets of Baal to provoke their god to action: shouting, cutting themselves with spears and knives until covered in blood, dancing, and raving, crying out, “Baal, answer us!” Note how much time and effort the false god took from the human worshipers.

Further Commentary

“Elijah’s taunt is that Baal was acting in a merely human manner. He uses terms known to the people from the Ugaritic Baal myths. Was the god musing on the action to take (‘deep in thought’)? Had he gone aside to answer the call of nature (so Targum; NEB ‘engaged’; NIV, after LXX, ‘busy’) or had he left on a journey with Phoenician merchants? Was Baal asleep as Yahweh was not (Ps. 121:3-4)? The practice of self-inflicted wounds to arouse a deity’s pity or response is attested in Ugarit when men ‘bathed in their own blood like an ecstatic prophet.’ In mourning this was forbidden to the Hebrews (Lev. 19:28; Deut. 14:1). Baal’s priests acted like ecstatic prophets ([1 Kings 18:]29, NIV, ‘frantic prophesying’; better RSV ‘ranted and raved’). This rare form of the verb (Heb. *hitnabbē*) is used of mad actions (cf. 2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26). The fact that there is no response indicates Baal’s impotence (Jer. 10:5).”⁷

—Donald J. Wiseman



Voices from Church History

“For many, it is a considerable test of faith to take control of how they spend their time.”⁸

—Dallas Willard (1935–2013)



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.”⁹

—J. D. Greear

When we, the people of God, spend the majority of our time and energy on the things of this world, we discover that our desire to join in God’s ministry to others, the ministry of turning hearts back toward Him, is reduced. False idols use up our time and energy and deplete us, often demanding much of our physical and spiritual resources. The true God is the One who builds us back up and ministers to us so that we have the potential to be effective witnesses to the power and grace of God. As well noted in 1 John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” God invests in us so that we can invest in others.



What are some “false gods” in our day that consume our time and effort (in reference to both Christians and non-Christians)?



How and why do these idols take so much of our time and effort?

God desires to be our answer, our power, our Savior. He calls us to trust Him. The Lord provides the answer, but we must provide an unhardened heart, a willing spirit, and an open mind. We must provide *our answer* in return, which is to truly trust Him, not wavering between the worship of false gods and the worship of the true God.

Elijah demonstrated how foolish it is to trust in false gods when he derided the prophets of Baal for the inability of their god to answer. Each statement of mockery was directly related to the myth of Baal. Why was there a need to shout if Baal were truly a god? Was Baal on one of his epic journeys? Was he tired and needing sleep? A god who was worthy of worship would not require such frivolous exertion of human effort to “make” him respond. A god who was worthy of worship cannot be tamed and corralled by human effort. By contrast, the God who *is* worthy of worship is sovereign.

The prophets brought ritual, tradition, ceremony, and religion into the call to Baal. Elijah brought *trust* when calling upon Yahweh. The prophets of Baal demonstrated their belief that the people must be *for* their god. However, Elijah showed that the God of glory is *for us*. What a vast difference between the two views! God wants us to be free to live in relationship with Him, free from the mindset that we must bleed out our lives in servitude to false gods, traditions, rituals, idols, and the worship of created things. It is the true God who gives humans true life.



How can Christians strike a balance between devoting time and effort to things of this world that are practical responsibilities (work, caretaking, parenting), things that are for pleasure, and things that are purposeful toward building relationship with God?





3. The God who answers with fire is destined to receive glory (1 Kings 18:30-39).

After the prophets of Baal spent most of the day attempting to receive an answer from their god, it was now Elijah's turn. When the time of day had reached the hour of the Jewish evening sacrifice, Elijah gave his offering and call to God.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown 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 came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." ³⁴ And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

Elijah began by repairing the dilapidated altar to the Lord. This altar had obviously not been utilized in some time. Remember back to when Elijah asked the people how long they would hesitate between two opinions (v. 21). Though intellectually the Israelites may have held a belief in God, in practice they were worshipping at the altar of Baal. Further, in this place where humans had once glorified God, an altar to a false god had supplanted the altar of the living Lord.

Doesn't this passage reveal a great truth in the lives of God's followers? When we neglect to give God our trust and neglect glorifying Him, we erect other "altars" on which we sacrifice our lives.

-  Why is it that we establish other altars when we neglect our relationship with God?
-  What do these altars communicate about who or what we are devoted to?

Humans always worship. That's why we see humans sacrificing their lives in worship of many different things: hot-topic causes, fandoms, sports, celebrities, politics, money, possessions, fashion, etc. Though the modern Western mind sometimes relegates "worship" to something done by ancient and ignorant people, we all end up in a worship-like state of something when we sacrifice our lives on the altar of that thing.

Further Commentary

"One of the remarkable features of this narrative is the fact that the Lord changed the hearts of the people by answering Elijah's prayer and demonstrating his incredible power. We are reminded that God's good news, whether in the Old or New Testament, constitutes a proclamation of his mighty deeds in real time and space. This is one reason why so much of the Bible consists of a narrative history. Over and over again, our covenant God is demonstrating to his people that he alone is the only true God. As such, he is to be trusted, turned to, and obeyed. As these events were intended to bring spiritual change to God's people in the days of Elijah, so the record of these events in Scripture is intended to have the same effect on us—to change our hearts and move us to authentic repentance."¹⁰

—Miles Van Pelt,
Gospel Transformation Bible

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

13. God Is Transcendent

God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9). When God saves us, He restores us so we can fulfill our human purpose; this does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.

bpk, Berlin / Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden
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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."


With no flashy dancing, no wailing or shouting, no self-mutilation, no extravagant religious routines or exertion, Elijah called upon God to show Himself as the true God. Notice Elijah's intention and motive when he said, "Answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Elijah's prayer was for God to receive the honor and glory of this redemptive act. The people, upon seeing God's swift and powerful response, fell to the ground in repentance proclaiming that Yahweh is God.

In the end, though Elijah was called the "troubler of Israel," the real problem was the exchange of the glory of God (truth) for the worship of things that humans create (falsehood). Baal was believed by his followers to be a powerful god of the storm and/or of fertility. Yet here in the contest on Mount Carmel, Baal was shown as powerless. Moreover, he was shown as a false god, lacking the ability to answer when called upon.



No matter where we are in life, one thing is clear from this passage—God is for us. In this battle between truth and falsehood, we see that the falsehood enslaves us and bleeds out our lives. However, the truth frees us and gives back to us life itself. The prophets of Baal cut themselves and bled to gain the attention of their god. The true God of the universe, however, bled and died for His creation.

The God who is worthy of worship offers redemption to us before we even recognize we need it: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8).

 How would you explain the difference between sacrificing your life to a false god and allowing God’s sacrifice to give you life?

Conclusion

Take some time this week to examine your life. Are you freeing yourself from the false idols and gods of this modern world to participate in Christ’s work of redemption? Every day, God gives us an opportunity to live in His freedom, spreading life and redemption to those who are crushed by the weight of false gods. Yet in order to breathe life into others, we must first begin releasing ourselves from the striving after the things of this world.

It is no easy task to untangle ourselves from the deceptive falsehoods we encounter daily. Sometimes we are already so bled out that we feel as though we have nothing left to offer. So let’s ask God to reveal to us where we have sacrificed ourselves to the things of the world (or perhaps even just one area), and offer those things up to God, trusting in Him to redeem us even now.

And let’s go one step further, asking the Lord to show us how these things have possibly kept us from God’s mission of turning others’ hearts back to Him. May we find the redemptive power of God just as alive and full of grace as did the Israelites that day on Mount Carmel.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The prophets of Baal danced and slashed themselves before the altar, thinking they must bleed in order to express their devotion. But the true God is different than false gods like Baal. He expressed His devotion to us by sending His Son—Jesus Christ—who bled and died for us so that we could receive His grace through faith.

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.”¹¹

—Michael Catt

Further Commentary

“Baalism provided a substitute religion without the moral demands of the Lord. Also Baalism claimed to provide the fertility needed in an agricultural society by satisfying the lusts of the flesh. Through their own sexual relations at the altar of Baal and those of the priests and priestesses, the people sought to entice through sympathetic magic Baal and his female consort to mate in heaven to produce on earth the needed fertility in crop life, animal life, and human life...How were the Israelites to have their needs met? Certainly, not through the worship of Baal! The contest on Mount Carmel proved that Baal was no god. Opening their hearts to the seducing spirits that enticed them to Baalism or any other false religion only led to destruction. The need was to look to the Lord their God and to serve Him with all their hearts. The Lord would then bless the Israelites with every blessing just as He promised them upon their entering the land of Canaan to possess it (Deut. 7:12-14; 28:1-14).”¹²

—John Traylor,
Biblical Illustrator