



[Slide 1] 2870 years ago¹, give or take a day ... or decade ... is when my favorite moment in Scripture happened. We read about it in 1 Kings, an Old Testament book that records the different kings that reigned over Israel. It's not a happy book; while some honored God, many did not. The king and queen during this moment of history? Ahab and Jezebel. If you recognize their names, it is because they have come to represent evil – which the two of them were. In fact, **1 Kings 16:30 (NLT)** says that Ahab ***“did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him.”*** He built a temple for Baal, a false god, and staffed it with 450 pagan prophets. He also set up an Asherah pole, which was the representation of a goddess – typically the consort or wife of the male gods.² And Jezebel? She had 400 prophets of Asherah.

All of this was in God’s kingdom, Israel. It was not good. Which is why God had placed them under his judgment in the form of a drought. After three years of no rain, Elijah, God’s one remaining prophet, took the stage and went before Ahab to deliver a challenge:

[Slide 2] **1 Kings 18:17-24 (NLT)** ¹⁷ ***When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, “So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?”***

Can you imagine going before the President greeted you as the “troublemaker of America”? And Ahab was a guy who had put prophets to death and wanted Elijah dead. I don’t know about you, but I would not feel like this was starting great if I were Elijah!

¹⁸ ***“I have made no trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “You and your family are the troublemakers,***

Oh snap.

for you have refused to obey the commands of the Lord and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.

¹ NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk Through Biblical History and Culture: New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 1491.

² Paul R. House, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Kings* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), Kindle location 3931.

[Slide 3] ***19 Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.***

Shockingly, rather than just execute Elijah then and there, Ahab agreed to this faceoff! He must have thought this was an opportunity to both humiliate Elijah, as well as put what he believed to be his superior strength on full display: the 850 pagan prophets vs. the one remaining prophet of God.

20 So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel.

Sounds magical.

[Slide 4] ***21 Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.***

Completely silent. They knew they were wrong, they did not want to admit it, and they wanted to keep being wrong. There is both a shame and a stubbornness in their silence, isn't there?

Elijah then went on to lay out the terms of the showdown: They would each build an altar, prepare it for sacrifice, and place a bull on it. Without setting fire to the altar, they would then pray to their gods or God, and whichever answered by setting the altar on fire would be the true God. Everyone agreed to these terms. Elijah then told the 450 prophets of Baal they could go first, since there were a lot of them and only one of him.

Here's the thing: the prophets of Baal most likely thought Elijah was a fool for these terms! Why? Because Baal was a god of thunder, a god of rain.³ Who better to light a fire than the god of lightning?

This reveals the wisdom of God's judgment; a drought on his people who have turned their worship to a supposed god of rain instead of Him.

[Slide 5] ***26 So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime,***

³ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 109.