

Trial by Fire
1 Kings 18
Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- For our icebreaker, let's take the quiz in the attachment. If you want to make a game of it and divide up into two or three teams, feel free.

INTRODUCTION: This week we're entering a new phase of our survey of the Bible where we're going to spend five weeks looking at some of the prophets, and the role they play in the Big Story. Last week we saw how God's people became divided into two nations, a Northern Kingdom called "Israel," and a Southern Kingdom called "Judah." King Ahab is now in charge, who ruled from app. 885-850 BC. And he's married a woman from outside Israel named Jezebel. Together they've not only led their people to worship idols, they've systematically tried to kill all the prophets of Yahweh, the true God of Israel.

When we first hear about God's prophet Elijah, in the beginning of Ch. 17, he comes to King Ahab and he says that God is going to send a drought that will last several years. It ends up producing a severe famine in the region. God is trying to break Ahab and Israel's worship of the rain god, Baal. In spite of the drought, the leaders and the people haven't turned to God. Even this extreme crisis hasn't awakened them to their need for change. In fact, Ahab searches for Elijah in order to kill him. A confrontation is necessary to catalyze change. So, God tells Elijah to "present himself" to Ahab.

TAKE TURNS READING 1 Kings 18:16-21.

1. God ordered Elijah to go meet with the person who had been hunting him down to kill him.
 - a. How would you feel if you were Elijah?
 - b. What in this passage (or in ch. 17, if you know the story) do you learn about Elijah's relationship with God that might enable him to have the faith to obey this command?
2. Why does Elijah "call the question" in v. 21?
 - a. Pastor Josh said that to "waver" in Hebrew literally means to sink, or collapse. How does the attempt to maintain spiritual neutrality actually lead to collapse?
3. It's easy for us to criticize those unsophisticated, ancient Jews, for worshipping a rain god (Baal). However, Pastor Josh stated that we similarly show our idolatry in that our hearts are inclined to worship all kinds of created things instead of the Creator, which is the essence of idolatry.
 - a. In your life, what comes closest to fighting with God for supremacy in your heart (success, family, desire for a family or for a spouse, recognition, control, beauty, etc.)? Discuss.
4. Someone once said, "You'll never find the true God until you recognize your false gods."
 - a. Why is it so difficult to acknowledge that we have elevated false gods in our hearts?
 - b. How did God use this competition between himself and Ahab's/Israel's idols to expose their false gods?

READ vv. 22-35

5. Notice how the Baal prophets cut themselves when their idol did not come through for them. How might we become progressively and destructively more attached to our idols and addictions when they repeatedly fail us? Have you ever experienced that yourself?
6. Josh also said, “God [often] allows some kind of drought, some kind of crisis, as his way of calling you back to himself, so that he can give you what you really need.”
 - a. Can you describe a time when this kind of “drought” has produced growth in your life?
 - b. Is there any draught, test, or crisis in your life right now that God might be using?

READ vv. 36-46.

7. Note Elijah’s prayer in verse 37. What does this prayer show us about God’s objective in this confrontation? Why does he not want to just obliterate the people?
8. How does the fire from heaven—which consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the altar, the soil, and the water—turn the people’s hearts back again?
9. How do these verses reveal about how your heart can be changed, if you have given some idol too much power in your life? (Pastor Josh said, “By seeing the sacrifice which was consumed for your sin.”)
10. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1.16). How does Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and the power of his resurrection enable our hearts to be released from our idols?
11. The Scottish writer Thomas Chalmers in his essay “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” said that to break the power of our idols over our heart, we can either

“Withdraw its regards from an object that is not worthy of it; or, [set] forth another object...as more worthy of its attachment, so as that the heart shall be prevailed upon not to resign an old affection, which shall have nothing to succeed it, but to exchange an old affection for a new one.... We must address to the eye of [the] mind another object, with a charm powerful enough to dispossess the first of its influences.

What is he saying about how to change the object of worship (idol) in our hearts? How is Jesus’ affection an expulsive power?
12. **Share and Pray:** Among our prayer requests, let’s pray that God will reveal our idols, expunge them, and replace them with a greater affection for him.

Quiz on The Big Story: Kings and Kingdoms

1. To understand Judges, you have to be aware of the cycle that plays out multiple times in the book. Which of these is NOT part of that cycle.
 - a) God shows favor to his people because of his grace.
 - b) People walk away from him and turn to idols, because that seemed to work for all the other nations.
 - c) God lets them experience oppression so that they will cry out to him.
 - d) God graciously chooses to intervene and raise up a judge, a leader or "rescuer."
 - e) People repent of their sins and turn back to God.
 - f) People live for long periods in faithful worship of God and observance of his covenant.
2. Which of the following is a significant, repeated refrain in the book of Judges? a) "I have a dream." b) "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." c) "So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him." d) "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."
3. What best summarizes God's reply to Israel's request for a human king through Samuel? a) You can have your king, but it will cost you; b) I've just been waiting for you to ask! c) No way! How dare you ask for a king! d) Would you like fries with that?
4. Which statement is true about the reign of Saul as the first human king of Israel? a) He was a good and noble king and honored God throughout his reign; b) He was a disaster from day 1; c) He got off to a good start, but hardened his heart toward God. d) He killed too many people to be of use in God's plans.
5. Pastor Josh says that 2 Samuel 11 & 12 (story of David and Bathsheba) show that: a) People are basically good and inclined to do the right thing, b) David wasn't such a bad guy, c) David was disqualified from God's redemptive plans because of his affair, d) the seeds of the worst sins imaginable live in every human heart.
6. In 2 Samuel 7, God extended to David the promises he had made with Abraham. What element did he add for David? a) David would build a temple for God; b) One of David's descendants would sit on an eternal throne; c) David would become the wisest man in the entire world; d) David would win the lottery.
7. Which of the following statements correctly describes Solomon's reign as king of Israel? a) leaders came from all over the world to hear his wisdom; b) he built a temple that was filled with God's Spirit; c) he amassed storehouses of gold and stables full of the finest horses; d) he led God's people into idolatry, e) all of the above.
8. True or false: we should view Solomon as a great foil for Jesus—in other words, a stark contrast to his kingship, which makes it shine more brightly.
9. What metaphor captures the way Israel's kings were supposed to relate to their people? a) lion, b) shepherd, c) waterfall, d) foil.
10. The kingdom of Israel became divided because a) Solomon's son, Rehoboam, listened to his peers' advice; b) Rehoboam ignored the elders' advice to be less harsh; c) God willed that most of the kingdom should be taken away from him; d) all of the above.
11. What did Rehoboam and Jeroboam have in common? a) they both listened to bad advice; b) they sought to make a name for themselves, rather than trusting God's promises; c) they both were in the line of David's descendants; d) A and B, e) A, B, and C.

Answer Key: The Big Story—Kings and Kingdoms

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