

# HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT BIBLE PASSAGES

Part 4 of New Days, Old Gods. 1 Kings 18:20-40.  
Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. July 28, 2024.

## 1 KINGS 18:20-40

**Read the passage.**

- The confrontation between the Lord and Baal.

### A CHALLENGING, CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGE

**The scene of death and destruction raises questions.**

- Some may find it difficult to reconcile the slaughter of Baal's prophets with the loving God revealed in Jesus Christ.

## A PROCESS FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT BIBLE PASSAGES

### FOUNDATIONS

**The conservative Christian tradition holds to the inspiration of the Bible.**

- It is the written word of God, without error.
- Therefore, we cannot simply dismiss this or any other Bible passage.

### RULES

**1. Be honest about your assumptions and biases.**

- We all bring a perspective to the Bible. What is your's?

**2. Identify the first recipients of the passage.**

- 1 Kings was written for the Jews exiled to Babylon in 586 BC.
- They were removed from the Land because they drifted into idolatry, etc.

**3. Consider the context, history, and culture of the passage.**

- 1 Kings refers to events in 9<sup>th</sup>-century Israel.
- The Old or Mosaic Covenant was in effect.
- Israel was a theocracy - temple and state were the same.
- Religious wars were typical of that time and place.

#### **4. Ask: What did the writer intend to communicate to the first readers?**

- 1 Kings explains why Israel and Judah had fallen and been sent into Exile.
- Elijah was called by God to bring Israel back to true worship.

#### **5. Examine the literary genre.**

- 1 Kings is theological narrative.
- History with a God-centered agenda.
- The priority is to promote true worship and allegiance.

#### **6. Focus on the main and the plain.**

- The meaning of the words and phrases in the author's context and culture is the meaning of the passage.

#### **7. Distinguish between description and prescription.**

- The Bible can describe an event without prescribing our behavior.
- 1 Kings 18 is descriptive, but is it prescriptive in any way?.

#### **8. Do not rush straight to the meaning and application of the passage.**

- First, understand what is said; then, interpret and apply.

#### **9. Remain humble and prayerful throughout.**

- Ask for the illumination and insight provided by the Holy Spirit.

Psalms 119:18 (CSB) Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

# TWO INSIGHTS THAT UNLOCK 1 KINGS 18

## God preserves his people.

- The continued existence of Israel was on the line. He needed to save them from “Baalism” so he could bless them.
- God’s Old Covenant Law stipulated the death penalty for anyone who led Israel away from true worship:

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (CSB) If a prophet or someone who has dreams arises among you and proclaims a sign or wonder to you, 2 and that sign or wonder he has promised you comes about, but he says, ‘Let’s follow other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let’s worship them,’ 3 do not listen to that prophet’s words or to that dreamer. ... 5 That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he has urged rebellion against the LORD your God ... You must purge the evil from you.

## God protects his honor.

- The theme of 1 Kings 18 is God’s right to receive Israel’s exclusive worship.
- He defeated Baal and his prophets to display his supreme glory.

Isaiah 42:8 (CSB) I am the LORD. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

## CONCLUSION AND TAKEAWAYS

### We must interpret the passage through ancient Israeli eyes.

- Religious warfare was commonplace in the ancient Near East.
- Idolatry was high treason in theocratic Israel.

### Follow the rules of biblical interpretation.

### Fear the Lord.

### Face Reality.

### Flee to Jesus Christ.

## **POSITIVE, ENCOURAGING WORDS FROM GOD**

John 16:33 (CSB) “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

Philippians 4:5-7 (CSB) Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Romans 16:20 (CSB) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Psalms 46:1-2, 11 (CSB) God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. 2 Therefore we will not be afraid ... 11 The LORD of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Nahum 1:7 (CSB) The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; he cares for those who take refuge in him.

Isaiah 41:10 (CSB) Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.

2 Timothy 1:7 (CSB) For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment.

Psalms 55:22 (CSB) Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

1 Peter 5:6-7 (CSB) Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

Romans 15:13 (CSB) Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.