



“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.”

- 1 Kings 18:37

## The Backdrop

At the command of God, Elijah had summoned 400 prophets of the idol Baal to a challenge – to see which of their God’s or god would answer “by fire.”

***“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 again”*** (1 Kings 18:37).

Few prayers in all of Scripture condense so much theology into so few words. It is not the length of a prayer that gives it weight before God, but its alignment with His will and nature. Elijah’s prayer is brief, direct, and utterly God-centered. Every phrase leans away from man and toward God - away from human effort and toward divine sovereignty. This moment on Mount Carmel was not merely a contest between prophets; it was a contest between grace and works. Between the faith that waits for the breath of God to breathe fire from heaven and a false religion that dances itself into exhaustion trying to evoke a response from its deity by human works. All day long the prophets of Baal cried, cut, and contorted, trying to summon power from a god who could not hear.

Then Elijah stepped forward and prayed once. No frenzy. No manipulation. No performance. Just a quiet confidence that the God who had hidden His face from Israel was once again about to reveal Himself in His sovereign mercy and grace and turn His people back to Himself. Just before that prayer Elijah had said, “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*” (v. 36). With that confession he laid to rest any notion that his obedience or faith had produced this moment. Synergists will often argue that God merely responded to Elijah’s faith or obedience. But Elijah’s own statement disproves that error and illustrates quite the reverse - he is the one who responded to what God ordained, initiated and sovereignty brought about.

The entire drama of 1 Kings 18 turns on that final clause: ***“that You have turned their hearts back again.”*** The verb is decisive. Elijah does not say, “that *they* may turn,” but “that *You have turned.*” This is past tense, not present, “that You are about to turn,” or future, “that You will turn.” The movement of the human heart is attributed entirely to God by the prophet here. Before the fire falls, grace has already fallen. What Israel is about to witness outwardly has already taken place inwardly by the Spirit of God. The theology of that moment is nothing less than Sola Gratia - Grace Alone displayed in powerful form. The fire descending from heaven is not

earned by Elijah's piety nor triggered by Israel's repentance. It is God's own act of reclaiming His covenant people. *Grace descends first; repentance follows.* Fire falls first; worship follows.

✚ **The pattern is always the same. And the same grace that begins the work is the grace that completes it.**

The God who kindles the flame keeps it burning. He is not merely the Initiator but the Finisher. He is truly the Alpha and Omega of *every* redemptive work! Even Elijah's repetition, "Answer me, O Lord, answer me," reveals dependence, not presumption. He does not demand an answer; he pleads for it, knowing that only God can awaken faith in hearts grown cold (see Jer. 3:22; Ezek. 36:24–26; Jer. 24:7). What he seeks is not personal vindication but divine revelation: "that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God." He longs for Israel's restoration, but he understands that such restoration can come only when God Himself turns their hearts back. Not that people will applaud the prophet but adore the living God as they confess "The LORD, He is GOD!".

### **John 6:29: "The work of God is..."**

Jesus affirmed this principle explicitly when He inverted the works-based premise of the question asked by the people in John 6:28–29. Their question was the question all synergists ask: "What shall *we* that we may work the works of God?" By inverting their premise and affirming, "The work (lit. act, doing, accomplishment) of God is to believe in Him whom He has sent," Jesus set the record straight. He understood both *what* He was saying and *why* He said it the way He did. What He said and how He said it affirm with absolute solidity the truth of sovereign grace: Sola Gratia.

The same truth breathes through every act of divine renewal. **Every true revival, every true awakening, all true conversion occurs by the breath of God (Ezek. 37).** The "valley of dry bones" - scattered, bleached in the sunlight, and dead in every sense of the word, had no capacity to live nor to consent with any work to make them live. If they were going to come together as "a mighty army," it would be brought about entirely by the wind, the breath, of God. This was unmistakably present in

Jesus' mind when He said to Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it will...*so it is with everyone born of the spirit*" (John 3:8).

The fire that fell and the worship that afterward arose were both brought about *entirely* by the Lord, who, as Elijah said, "turned their hearts back." This is Sola Gratia on display.

When the heart grows cold, our hope is not in rekindling our own zeal but in the One of whom Matthew said, "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not quench." The flame that flickers is still His flame. The smouldering heart is one He has already ignited. He tends what He has kindled. He completes what He begins (Phil. 1:6). The cross remains the altar where fire fell once for all time and for all "His people" (Matt. 1:21), and every renewed spark of devotion in us is but a reflection of that first blaze. Grace descended first; repentance followed. Fire fell first; worship followed. The work that begins with God ends with God. He is the Alpha and Omega of salvation in every aspect.

Soli DEO Gloria

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