

BIBLE BACKGROUND

JOURNEY 6: “Fire from Heaven!”

Elijah, God’s Powerful Prophet

Key Passages:

1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2:1–18

Key Word:

Determination

Key Verse:

“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

—Acts 4:20

Key Thought:

I am determined to share the message of salvation in Christ.

ELIJAH WHO?

The prophet Elijah appeared on the pages of the biblical record when King Ahab and Queen Jezebel ruled the northern kingdom of Israel as described in 1 Kings 16–22. He had come from Tishbe in Gilead and was known as “Elijah the Tishbite.” Little is known about his background. His name meant “Yahweh is my God” and this would appear to be the motto of his life.¹⁴

- His faith in God was limitless.
- His zeal was all-consuming.
- Nothing could shake his confidence in Jehovah; there was no labor too great nor duty too demanding to change his focus.
- His obedience was simple and unquestioning.
- He could be stern as he stood to oppose sin or he could be compassionate as he sympathized with the widow in the death of her son.
- He was a recluse by nature who only appeared to deliver God’s message, perform a divine miracle and then disappear again.
- To him God had given power to shut up the heavens so no rain would fall.
- He called down fire from heaven at Mount Carmel before the prophets of Baal.

¹⁴ “Understanding Kings and Chronicles,” *What the Bible Is All About* by Dr. Henrietta C. Mears, Regal Books, 1998, p. 150–151.

BAAL: THE GOD OF AHAB AND JEZEBEL

When Ahab became the seventh king of Israel, he took Jezebel as his wife; she was an avid worshipper of the god Baal. Together she and Ahab built worship centers and temples throughout Israel. Priests and prophets for Baal were commissioned and ordained by the multitudes. Ahab had given his official sanction to the worship of Baal by allowing a temple in honor of Baal to be built in Samaria (1 Kings 16:32). The Bible says that “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). Under his rule the prophets of Jehovah were slaughtered. Some escaped by hiding in caves. True religion was about to perish.

NO RAIN FOR YOU!: 1 Kings 17:1–2

God would not allow His Word and His prophets to be destroyed. He sent a messenger to Ahab—the fiery Elijah who was not afraid to confront the evil of his day. He warned Ahab that God said: “there shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word.” Unless the worship of Baal was stopped, then the land of Israel would experience a terrible famine. Months without rain might be explained away but not three and a half years. A drought would prove that Baal, the god of the rains and fertility, was powerless to overcome the God of Elijah.

GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL CARE:

1 Kings 17:8–24

During this period of drought, God sent Elijah to a poor widow in the town of Zarephath. The widow had no kinsman to care for her and her young son. She was led by the Spirit of God to provide the prophet with food and a place to stay during the drought. She had only a little meal and oil left for food for her son and for herself. She feared that after it was gone, she and her son would die. She did as the prophet said and prepared for him the last food she had. Her compassion and obedience were rewarded by a miracle. Her supply of oil and flour were not diminished throughout the period of the drought according to the word God had given Elijah. The faith of both the woman and Elijah were strengthened with the never-ending supply of food and prepared them to meet greater challenges that lay ahead.

SHOWDOWN ON MOUNT CARMEL:

1 Kings 18:20–40

Three years later Elijah appeared before Ahab again. This time he demanded that the prophets of Baal meet him on Mount Carmel in a test of power. He prepared a sacrificial offering and explained to the group that the prophet who could call down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice would be the true representative of the one true God. After pleading with Baal all day long, Ahab's prophets could produce no fire. Elijah then rose to call on his God. He saturated the sacrificial area with water and then he called on God to send fire, which immediately flashed across the sacrifice and licked up every drop of water. When the people saw it, they declared that Yahweh was the true God. Elijah ordered that all 450 prophets of Baal be seized and taken to the brook of Kishon and there to be executed.

A LITTLE PITY PARTY!: 1 Kings 19:1–21

After Mount Carmel, Elijah thought Ahab and Jezebel would yield to the power of Almighty God. However, Jezebel did not fear God and threatened to do to Elijah what he had done to her prophets.

- Downcast and frightened, Elijah ran away into the southern boundary of Judah.
- He prayed the Lord would take his life.
- In despair, he fell into a deep sleep. God sent an angel with food to sustain him.
- The angel told Elijah to go to Mount Sinai where God would speak to him.

On Mount Sinai, God sent a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire to announce His arrival. In "a still small voice," God spoke to Elijah. Elijah complained that He had done everything the Lord had asked them. Still, the people worshipped Baal and killed the prophets of God. Elijah was now the only one left and now he was going to be killed.

- God knew the prophet's heart, his pain and his sense of failure.
- God was quietly, almost imperceptibly, working out His plan for His people.
- He told Elijah to anoint Hazael as a new king over Syria, to anoint Jehu as king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as a prophet to take his place before God's people.
- God had held in reserve 7,000 men in Israel who had never bowed their knees to Baal. They had remained faithful to Almighty God and now God was going to use these warriors. Under the leadership of these three men God would complete the execution of the Baal worshippers that Elijah had begun.

The prophet's work had not been in vain. God was still on the throne working out the salvation of those who remained faithful to Him.

A CHARIOT OF FIRE: 2 Kings 2:1–11

Elijah's work on earth as a prophet of God had been completed. It was now time to pass his responsibilities to his successor Elisha. As these two men stood together on the banks of the Jordan River, Elisha declared that he would not leave the side of his beloved mentor. Elijah removed his cloak and rolled it up almost as if to form a rod. When he struck the waters of the Jordan with the cloak, the river was divided so that the two of them could cross over on dry ground to the east side. Elisha asked Elijah to bless him by giving him a double portion of his mighty spiritual power. This was not for Elijah to give. Spiritual strength and ability can only from God Almighty.

Elijah said that if God allowed Elisha to see him depart, then this would be a sign that God was with Elisha and would guide him to be a great and mighty prophet.

- Suddenly, a chariot appeared with horses seemingly on fire.
- The chariot passed between the two men as if to separate them.
- Elijah was scooped up and taken into heaven without appearing to die.

So quickly had it happened. Elijah was gone but Elisha had witnessed it for himself. God had appointed him as Elijah's successor and given him the spiritual power he would need for the tasks that lay ahead. Elisha picked up the cloak of Elijah and rolled it up just as Elijah had done. When he struck the waters of the Jordan, they parted again and he crossed back over to the other side. This event validated him as Elijah's legitimate spiritual successor.

JESUS AND ELIJAH: Matthew 17:1–7; Mark 9:2–8

The chariot of fire may have been a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus taking the prophet to heaven. When Jesus faced His approaching death on the cross, He singled out Peter, James and John to come with Him up to a high mountain. There before their very eyes, Jesus was transfigured in such a way that the glory of God literally shone outwardly beyond His human form. There appeared beside Jesus both Moses and Elijah (Mark 9:2–8). This scene depicted the truth that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses and of all the prophets had spoken as signified by the presence of Elijah.

Like the apostles who came after him, Elijah had been determined to declare the word of God to a world that had rejected God. Even through discouragement and

difficult circumstances, he persevered. Now the task has fallen to the church to carry the message of the Messiah to each generation. May we all find ourselves as determined as Elijah to deliver the message of salvation.

*“For we cannot but speak of
what we have seen and heard.”*

—Acts 4:20

JOURNEY 6

TEACHING PLAN

JOURNEY 6: “Fire from Heaven!”

Elijah, God’s Powerful Prophet



<p>Key Passages 1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2:1–18</p>	<p>Key Word <i>Determination</i></p>
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INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

A. CONNECT the Big Room experience with the Bible story by asking the students questions about how the things they saw relate to the key word and the key thought for the day. Use the following questions to stimulate conversation.

- “Who in the family was trying to be determined?”
- “Were they successful in finishing the task?”
- “Would you consider yourself a determined person?”

B. FIRE—GOOD OR BAD?

Carefully strike a match or light a candle and use it as a visual aid to set transition to the story. Talk about the properties of fire and how it can be used for good and evil.

- Ask the students to explain what they think this phrase means: “He had a fiery temper.”
- Elijah was often considered a “fiery prophet.” What could that possibly mean?
- Fire was involved in Elijah’s ministry on several occasions. Let’s see what this “fire from heaven” was all about.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE PASSAGE

In the last journey we saw how Elijah prayed for God to show His power and might. God sent fire down from heaven to consume completely a sacrifice Elijah had set up on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal had shown themselves powerless against the God of Israel. Fire from heaven had demonstrated God's might.



TABLE TALK 1

HAVE the students get into their table groups. Explain that we are about to see a “pity party” in today's lesson. Ask them to share a few details about what a pity party looks like to them. Ask them to discuss these questions:

- What causes you to have a pity party?
- How do others know you are in the middle of a pity party?
- What facial expressions do you use during these times?
- How long do these parties last?
- How do you think your behavior honors God?
- What would be a better way to resolve these feelings of sadness?

In today's lesson, we are going to see one of God's greatest prophets in the middle of a big pity party.

A. ELIJAH'S PITY PARTY

Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah after the prophets of Baal were slaughtered. Elijah was afraid and so he ran for his life (1 Kings 19:1–3). As he slept in a cave, he heard God's voice.

- What signs did God send to get his attention? Read aloud 1 Kings 19:11–12. (*a strong wind, an earthquake, a fire, a whisper*)
- What did this form of fire mean? (*God was present.*)
- When God asked him what he was doing in the cave, what did Elijah say to indicate he was having a pity party? Read 1 Kings 19:14. (*forsaken covenant, altars thrown down, prophets killed, only Elijah left*)
- What surprise did God have for him? Read 1 Kings 19:17. (*7,000 men still left in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal*)

B. A CHARIOT OF FIRE

SAY: Elijah was at the end of his ministry on earth. He had done everything he could to rid the country of idolatry. Who would take his place? There was no need to worry; God already had the right man in place.

- Who was it? Read 2 Kings 2:9–10. (*Elisha*)
- God sent a special vehicle to pick Elijah up and whisk him away to heaven. Read 2 Kings 2:11–12 and have the students describe the scene.
- Where did the fire come from? (*heaven*)

C. DEATHS OF AHAB AND JEZEBEL

EXPLAIN that Elijah had prophesied about the death of Ahab and Jezebel. Read this prophecy in 1 Kings 21:17–19. Then read about how it was fulfilled in 1 Kings 22:29–39. Describe how Ahab's death occurred just as Elijah had said.

D. JESUS AND ELIJAH

- When do we see Elijah again on earth? Read Mark 9:2–8.
- What did Moses and Elijah represent as they appeared with Jesus?
- What appearance did Jesus take on? (*glorious, radiant, shining*)



THE CROSSROADS

Elijah had been determined to deliver the message of warning God had given him.

- God used fire to show the power of Elijah's God over pagan idols.
- He used fire to show Elijah that He knew his needs. Elijah was not alone.
- He used fire to carry his fiery prophet to heaven.
- He will use fire again to purge the earth of sin's stain when Jesus comes to set up His eternal kingdom (2 Peter 3:12).

Elijah has seen Jesus Himself. He has experienced the light of His glory. When a person receives Jesus as Savior, God sends the light of His love to fill that person with His very own Spirit. Each time a person is born into God's forever family, it is a miracle of love and grace. Ask the

JOURNEY 6

students to consider personally receiving Jesus as Savior if they have never made that decision before. *[Share the plan of salvation and close in prayer. Use a candle to represent the light of God's love shining in our hearts.]* God is waiting to demonstrate His own miraculous power in each and every one of us.



BIBLE LEARNING PROJECT:

Faith Cross Necklace

Supplies: Pre-cut cord, wooden cross pendant, two each of the following pony beads: black, red, white, blue, green and yellow

- Distribute a faith cross kit to each student.
- Instruct each student to begin by threading the wooden cross on the lace.
- Next, guide the students to thread the following beads on the left side of the cross in the following order: black, red, white, blue, green and yellow.
- Then, direct the students to repeat the same process and bead order on the right side of the cross.
- When beading is complete, have the students tie the two sides of the lace together into a knot.
- Encourage the students to wear the necklace or tie to their backpack so they can share the message of salvation in Christ with someone who may not know Him.



SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Acts 4:20

"For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

- Give each student a piece of paper and ask them to draw the scene of Elijah being carried away to heaven in a chariot of fire.
- Then have the students write out today's key verse somewhere on the page.
- Give them opportunity to share their pictures with others.
- Lead them in saying the verse at first very softly and then louder and louder.



TABLE TALK 2

A. ASK the students to discuss the word *determination* in their small groups.

- What does the word mean?
- Who do you know that demonstrates this quality?
- Is it a good thing to be *determined*? Why or why not?
- How can *determination* help a sports team? The president of a large company? Your parents? A teacher? Elijah? Jesus?
- Would you consider yourself to be a *determined* person? What would your parents say about that if you asked them?
- Look at Acts 4:20 again. What if Peter and John had not been determined to deliver the Gospel message?
- How would the church have been affected?
- What will happen if you are not determined to deliver the Gospel message?
- What can you tell people about Jesus?

B. EXPLAIN that Elijah had prophesied about the death of Ahab and Jezebel. Read this prophecy in 1 Kings 21:17–19. Then read about how it was fulfilled in 1 Kings 22:29–39. Even though he was king, Ahab died in shame just as Elijah had prophesied. What is the test to determine a true prophet of God? (if what he says comes true) Name other prophecies in the Bible that have come true.



A LOOK AT THE BOOK

Look up the following verses and see whose name keeps appearing.

- 1 Kings 17:6
- 1 Kings 17:15
- 1 Kings 19:5–8
- 2 Kings 2:11
- Matthew 17:3

What are the names of the divisions of the Bible where Elijah's name appears? (*The Books of History and in the Gospels*) Jesus knew Elijah well.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Elijah asked God for something very special in 1 Kings 18:36–37. What did Elijah want God to show the people of Israel? (*His power*)
2. Why was Elijah so afraid of Jezebel? (*She has killed many prophets and threatened to kill him.*)
3. How did God get Elijah's attention in the cave? (*a wind, an earthquake and fire*)
4. How did God take Elijah to heaven? (*in a chariot of fire*)
5. Who was Elijah's successor? (*Elisha*)
6. Where does Elijah appear again in the New Testament? (*with Jesus and Moses when He was transfigured*)
7. How did Elijah show his determination? (*before Ahab and on Mount Carmel*)
8. What do we call the books that describe the rule of kings in the Bible? (*The Books of History*)
9. In what kingdom did Ahab rule? (*the northern kingdom of Israel*)
10. What did Ahab call Elijah? (*the troubler of Israel*)
11. Who was the one who really caused the trouble in Israel? (*Ahab*)