

 Bible Study Fellowship®

**KINGDOM DIVIDED**

# ELIJAH

A 2 WEEK MINI-STUDY





Welcome to BSF's two-week study of Elijah! We hope God speaks to you through His Word and your group discussion.

**Here's how the Bible study works:**

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!

For more information visit [bsfinternational.org](https://bsfinternational.org)

# Elijah: Prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel

1 Kings 15:25–18:46

## Lesson Questions

**First Day: Read Lesson 3 Notes.**

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. How did the notes specifically encourage you to walk faithfully with God? How did you apply that this week?
2. How did God use the lecture to bring clarity, conviction, or challenge as you processed the lives and choices of Asa and Abijah?

**Second Day: Read 1 Kings 15:25–17:6.**

*Elijah entered the scene in the kingdom of Israel amid a succession of evil kings.*

3. Record the names of Israel's six kings listed in 15:25–16:34. What were some of the results of their leadership choices?

4.
  - a. What announcement did Elijah make to King Ahab?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How did God protect and provide for Elijah?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What do you learn about God as you reflect on Elijah's experience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Tell about a situation in which God protected or provided for you in ways you did not expect.

**Third Day: Read 1 Kings 17:7-24.**

*God sent Elijah to a destitute widow to meet his needs and develop his faith.*

6.
  - a. How did the widow's actions demonstrate faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What did Elijah and this woman experience that revealed God and stretched their budding faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7.
  - a. In what ways did the widow and Elijah respond to the grief they experienced?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How do you respond or react when life raises hard questions or causes you to doubt God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Elijah believed God could raise the dead. How does God's power over death give you hope and alleviate your fears (see Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; and Philippians 3:20-21)?

**Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 18:1-39.**

*Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown at Mount Carmel.*

9. How did Elijah's providential encounter with Obadiah set the stage for the events that followed?

10. In what ways did Elijah's words and actions on Mount Carmel boldly express courageous faith?

11. a. What specific requests did Elijah pray to God, and how did God answer?

b. How did the people respond?

c. According to James 5:16-18, what was the key to the power God demonstrated in Elijah's life?

12. Tell about a situation you are currently facing where standing for God requires faith and courage.  
What are you asking God to do?

**Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 18:40-46.**

*Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal, and God sent rain to Israel.*

13. Why might the judgment of the 450 prophets of Baal have been required?

14. a. How did Elijah demonstrate faith and expectancy as he waited for God to bring rain?

b. What impresses you most about Elijah?

15. What prayer are you waiting on God to answer? How can you demonstrate faith and expectancy while you wait?

**Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 15:25–18:46.**

*God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.*

16. How did your study this week impact your thinking about prayer and God's power?

*No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders*



# Lesson Notes

1 Kings 15:25–18:46

## Focus Verse

“Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” – 1 Kings 18:37

## Outline

- **Elijah Exploded Onto the Scene – 1 Kings 15:25–17:1**
- **Elijah Experienced God’s Provision – 1 Kings 17:2-24**
- **Elijah Exposed God’s Power – 1 Kings 18**

## Engage

Have you ever lit a candle in the midst of an electrical blackout? A small flicker of light suddenly cuts through to illuminate what the darkness has hidden. We often feel like God’s light has gone out in our world or at least been significantly dimmed. Evil is applauded, and God seems ignored. People do what is right in their own eyes with little sense of accountability to Him. However, no matter how pervasive the darkness can seem, God’s light will never be extinguished. His message and voice will not be silenced. **In the midst of the majority who turn their back on their Creator, God calls individuals to boldly speak for Him and stand for what is right.**

Evil and idolatry escalated in the kingdom of Israel. In the midst of this, God raised up a prophet to stand against wickedness and proclaim the truth. Elijah knew that the one true God was stronger than anyone or anything that opposed Him. Clothed in the power of Almighty God, Elijah courageously appeared before evil men. **God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.** God’s light will never go out. In a world where evil appears out of control, God remains in control. He still speaks. His light shines through His people.

## Elijah Exploded Onto the Scene – 1 Kings 15:25–17:1

### The Parade of Evil Kings in Israel – 15:25–16:34

As we shift our focus from the kingdom of Judah to the kingdom of Israel, these verses offer a dismal and blunt record of escalating evil. A succession of wicked kings seized power through murderous coups and amidst ongoing political strife. **The historical record of the kingdom of Israel reveals**

**catastrophic and escalating spiritual decline.** This passage lists the six kings who followed Israel's King Jeroboam and who led Israel deep into rebellion against God: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab.

Our next lessons enter the scene during the reign of the notoriously wicked King Ahab. Married to Jezebel, also infamously sinful, Ahab was “more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.” He normalized sin and fortified his kingdom in idolatry. However, God's light prevails over darkness. **Against this bleak backdrop, God sent the mighty prophet Elijah.** The story of this powerful man of God offers rich encouragement and lessons for us.

## The Prophet God Sent to Israel – 17:1

The wickedness rising within Israel did not escape God's attention. King Ahab set up a temple to Baal, a false god that would plague their future. He led the people into pervasive idolatry and aroused the Lord's righteous anger. **As God's own people rejected Him and turned to other gods, He sent the prophet Elijah to pronounce His judgment on their sin.** God's discipline and acts of judgment upon the Israelites were not merely punitive but also corrective. His wrath against their sin is clear, but so is His compassionate and persistent pursuit of their wandering hearts.

Elijah crashed into Ahab's presence like a thunderclap from heaven. With no recorded backstory, Elijah arrived with unknown credentials and from an unknown place. Scholars cannot locate his town, Tishbe. Elijah's end was just as unexpected as his beginning. While he was still talking to his successor Elisha, Elijah was swept up to the sky by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire.<sup>1</sup> **Between Elijah's sudden appearance and spectacular exit lies a succession of amazing miracles and accomplishments.**

**Elijah's unswerving allegiance to the one true God makes him stand tall among Old Testament personalities.** His story reveals his stern and passionate zeal for God alongside his real compassion and personal struggles. The New Testament speaks more of Elijah than any other Old Testament prophet. Elijah appeared with Moses at the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus.<sup>2</sup> God's strength propelled the ministry of this intriguing prophet.

Elijah's abrupt entrance sets up a showdown between the stronghold of evil and the power of Almighty God. God provided Elijah with the courage to deliver a grim message to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” **A devastating drought would bring famine and human suffering and only cease when Elijah said so.**<sup>3</sup> How and why would God work this way? Baal worshipers believed their god had to be awakened from the dead to provide rain. At the end of three dry years, they would know that neither drought nor rain were a quirk of nature. The power of the Creator God, who controls every drop of water in the universe, was put on vibrant display.<sup>4</sup> When the idolatrous Israelites next saw rain three and a half years later, the powerlessness of their false gods would be clear.

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1: Elijah's sudden departure: 2 Kings 2:11

2: Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36

3: Elijah and the drought: James 5:17-18

4: God controls rain: Genesis 2:5; 7:4; Job 38:25-28; Psalm 147:8; Amos 4:7

# Elijah Experienced God's Provision – 1 Kings 17:2-24

Elijah's bold pronouncement made him a wanted man. Ahab and Jezebel blamed Elijah for the suffering they and their kingdom endured. The Lord warned him to head east of Jordan to the Kerith Ravine. At this place and through this trying period, God graciously met Elijah's practical needs.

## God's Provision in the Wilderness – 17:2-7

God provided Elijah a place of refuge. He promised to meet the prophet's needs. Elijah obeyed God and headed to the designated hideaway. **He drank from the brook, and ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and evening.** To an Israelite, ravens were considered an unclean bird. This experience surely humbled Elijah. With time to think and regular reminders of God's care, Elijah learned that the God he served was trustworthy and good.

**God did not remove Elijah from the famine but cared for his needs in a miraculous and unexpected way.** Surely this early experience in Elijah's ministry prepared him for the future. He was hidden from those who sought him harm and sheltered by a God who loved him. God was training His servant in faith, humility, submission, and obedience. Elijah learned to have confidence in God's tender care. When the brook dried up due to the intensifying drought, God led His faithful servant to yet another experience that developed Elijah's faith.

## God's Provision Through a Starving Widow – 17:8-24

### The Depleted Jar – 17:8-16

**God did not meet Elijah's needs by sending him to a wealthy benefactor but rather to a starving widow in Zarephath, a region of Sidon.** This Phoenician town was located in Jezebel's home territory – right in the heart of Baal worship. This humbling situation revealed the extent of Elijah's neediness and required him to depend fully on God. He often reveals His gracious care and meets our needs in ways we do not anticipate.

Elijah arrived at the town gate and found the widow gathering sticks. He asked her for water and bread. **The woman told Elijah that she did not have bread, but only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug.** She was gathering sticks to build a fire to prepare a last meal for herself and her son before they died of starvation. We can only imagine Elijah's thoughts as he heard the dire circumstances into which God had clearly sent him.

**Rather than apologizing for his bold request, Elijah called this struggling widow to bold faith.** He told her not to be afraid. She was to go home and first make something for him and then for herself and her son. He called this woman to believe in advance what would only make sense later. Elijah bolstered his request with a promise straight from God: "For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.'"

The widow experienced regular deliveries of God's miraculous provision through sacrificial obedience and decisive faith. She experienced God's sufficiency in a tremendously personal way. Every time she reached into the jar for flour and tipped the oil jug to pour out what she needed that day, she had the opportunity to praise God for what only He could have provided. **God delivered His provision one meal at a time.** She and her son were sustained as God also met Elijah's needs.

God meets our needs out of His generous abundance. He never lacks anything or struggles to provide what we need. **God can lavishly provide from a "jar" we deem as empty.** Sometimes we have to serve God when we are weary and tired. Other times, we must trust God for financial needs, family needs, or answers we lack. God's loving purposes go beyond merely easing our pressure or solving a practical problem. When God meets our needs in these extremely personal ways, we learn that He can be trusted. God develops our faith by revealing His sufficiency and calling us to trust Him more.

### The Dead Boy – 17:17-24

Sometime later, the widow's son became desperately ill and died. She bitterly blamed Elijah for his death. This woman could bear no more. She had already lost her husband and faced impending death during a famine. **Even while she was actively trusting God and caring for His prophet, the unthinkable had happened – her beloved son lay dead.** This painful reality raised agonizing questions.

*Whenever He provided for a physical need in Elijah's life, God had a greater spiritual goal.*

Elijah sprang to action on her behalf. He scooped up the boy, took him to an upper room, and cried out to the Lord in anguish and desperation. He stretched himself out over the boy and boldly prayed, "LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" Verse 22 simply states a miracle too big for human words, "The LORD heard Elijah's cry ...." **The God of heaven – the giver of life – answered Elijah's prayer and raised the dead boy back to life.** Elijah presented the boy to his mother. Out of her overwhelmed heart she spoke words of solid faith, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."

This amazing resurrection built the widow's faith in Elijah's God and served as faith training for Elijah, training he would need in the very next events of his life. God demonstrated His mighty power and awesome provision through this miracle of life. Whenever He provided for a physical need in Elijah's life, God had a greater spiritual goal. **God builds our faith by meeting our needs and allowing us to share our faith with others.**

## Elijah Exposed God's Power – 1 Kings 18

### Elijah and Obadiah – 18:1-16

**After three long years of severe drought and famine, God again sent Elijah before King Ahab to announce that He would mercifully send rain.** Ahab's palace administrator was a man named Obadiah – a devout believer in the Lord. This Obadiah, a different man than the prophet by the same name, had courageously protected a hundred godly prophets from Jezebel's murderous wrath by hiding them in caves and supplying them with food and water. We can only imagine his internal conflict as he

# God Brings Life to What Is Dead

## The Doctrine of Resurrection

The resurrection of the beloved son of a struggling widow demonstrated God's power over death. **In a much greater way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead offers unshakable hope for everyone who puts their faith in Him.** Jesus offered His life as He died on the cross. He paid sin's price in full. When He rose again, He sealed victory over sin and death for those who trust Him for salvation. This glorious truth stands as the foundation for many Christian doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

Through Jesus' resurrection power, believers can live a redeemed life because the Holy Spirit brings life to dead hearts. Romans 8:11 says, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." Jesus paid sin's great cost and solved mankind's most pressing crisis – physical and spiritual death. Just as Jesus was raised, all believers will be resurrected in a glorified body prepared for eternity.<sup>6</sup> **Jesus' resurrection sealed His victory over sin and death for those who trust Him for salvation.**

**Apart from the truth of Jesus' resurrection, death wins.** What does life even mean if there is no hope beyond our last breath? People are born and experience some joy and sorrow, but it all ends. Something within us tells us there should be more.

There is more. We were created in God's own image, with an inborn sense of our eternity.<sup>7</sup> **Jesus' resurrection promises that, through Him, we will be raised again to life eternal.** His resurrection won back what sin stole from humanity. Job 19:25-26 states it well: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Because Jesus lives, we shall live also.

served both Ahab and the Lord. Obadiah was dutifully searching the land for grass for Ahab's animals. He saw and recognized Elijah, who asked Obadiah to arrange an audience with Ahab. Given Ahab's all-out effort to locate and kill Elijah, Obadiah feared that this task meant his own certain death. When Elijah emphasized his God-given task to appear before Ahab, Obadiah agreed.

## The Showdown at Mount Carmel – 18:17-40

Elijah stood before King Ahab, who callously greeted him as the "troubler of Israel." Ahab blamed God and Elijah rather than recognizing that his own sin had caused his nation's distress. How often do we blame anyone but ourselves for our sin? Elijah confronted the issue head-on and responded to Ahab with a bold challenge. First, he clearly identified that Ahab and his father's family bore responsibility for Israel's troubles. They, not Elijah, were the ones who had rejected God to follow Baal. Secondly, Elijah called on Ahab to gather people from all Israel as well as the 450 prophets of

5: The centrality of the resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15

6: Believers' future resurrection: Philippians 3:20-21

7: Eternal perspective: Ecclesiastes 3:11; Hebrews 11:19

Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table. **Elijah set up a showdown between God Almighty and the false gods the Israelites worshiped.**

Ahab sent out word and gathered the prophets as Elijah directly challenged the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." The people said nothing. **Though vastly outnumbered by the false priests, Elijah did not stand alone but rather with the one true God.**

Elijah instructed the priests to bring two bulls and prepare one for sacrifice; he would prepare the other. They would call on their gods, and he would call on his God. **Elijah laid down the challenge: "The god who answers by fire – he is God."** The priests of Baal went first, calling to Baal from morning till noon without response. They danced around the altar as Elijah taunted, "Shout louder! ... Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." Despite their frantic activity until time for the evening sacrifice, no one answered – there was no response.

Elijah called the people and repaired the altar that had been torn down. He took 12 stones, representing Israel's 12 tribes, and built the altar. He dug a trench around the altar and filled four large jugs with water. Three times, he ordered the wood on the altar to be soaked with water from the jars. **At the time of sacrifice, Elijah passionately prayed for the Lord to make Himself known as the God of Israel.** He did not seek to merely show up the priests of Baal. Elijah wanted the people of Israel to know the Lord was God and to turn their hearts back to Him. A sacrifice for the sin of the people had to be offered before God would restore the land with rain.

**In answer to Elijah's prayer, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice as well as the entire altar including the water in the trench.** God accepted the sacrifice. God provided power from on high. The stunned crowd fell down and declared, "The LORD – he is God!"

Elijah ordered the 450 prophets of Baal to be seized and slaughtered in the Kishon Valley. The modern name for this area is Nahr el-Mokattah, or "the river of slaughter." This grisly scene emphasizes the judgment awaiting those who reject God and lead others to do so.<sup>8</sup> Elijah's response was not merely punitive but reflected God's desire for the purity of His people. **Every act of judgment recorded in Scripture reveals the seriousness of sin and offers a call to repentance.**

## The Persistent Prayer that Unlocked God's Promises – 18:41-46

**God provided rain in a direct response to Elijah's prayers and in a clear display of His power.** Ahab was sent away to eat and drink while Elijah waited for rain to fall. He climbed the mountain with his servant, confident in God's promise even though not a cloud was in the sky. Seven times he sent his servant to check for signs of the coming storm. Finally, the servant reported a small cloud forming over the sea. Elijah sent a message to Ahab telling him to board his chariot and begin his journey in anticipation of the downpour. As the sky turned black and the rain began to furiously fall, Elijah was so energized by the power of the Lord that he outran Ahab's chariot as they raced toward Jezreel.

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8: Sin brings death: Romans 6:23

The people witnessed and expressed what Elijah knew well – “The LORD, he is God!” The fire that consumed the soaked sacrifice and the rain that watered the dry earth both revealed the undeniable power of Almighty God. Elijah trusted God to meet his needs and show His power. His boldness was not the product of human strength, but a demonstration of power from heaven above. **God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.**

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

**God raised up the prophet Elijah to confront evil and idolatry in the northern kingdom of Israel.** He stepped into Israel’s story under the reign of the notoriously wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Baal worship, immorality, and rejection of God pervaded the kingdom. Elijah appeared as God’s representative before King Ahab to announce a severe drought in Israel. Fleeing for his own protection, Elijah experienced God’s tender care in moments of desperate need. He enjoyed unexpected provisions at the brook, from the ravens, and in the form of a destitute widow, an empty jar of flour, and a depleted jug of oil. These timely expressions of God’s faithfulness prepared Elijah to trust God when the stakes were high. God met Elijah’s needs and developed his faith through surprising and humbling ways.

**At Mount Carmel, Elijah experienced God’s power in a public display of bold faith.** Though vastly outnumbered by pagan priests, Elijah stood boldly with and for God. The prophets of Baal were proven powerless as God Almighty sent down fire to consume Elijah’s sacrifice and poured out needed rain in answer to Elijah’s prayer. This unmistakable demonstration of God’s power was a merciful invitation for God’s people to return to Him. God again proved Himself powerful and trustworthy to His faithful servant Elijah.

### Apply It

Do you feel like God’s voice and the influence of Christians is being silenced in today’s world? Believers are marginalized, persecuted, and martyred in a world that seems to have rejected God. The culture of our current day has become so combative that any voice speaking for God and His ways is attacked. Elijah’s amazingly relevant story offers hope. God raised him up as the lone voice of truth amidst a culture that had turned away from God. The light of God that shined powerfully through Elijah was stronger than the darkness that surrounded him. Are you the only believer in your family, neighborhood, or workplace? Does it seem like evil is winning when you read the daily news? Elijah’s story and the final chapters of the Bible remind us that God wins. **Sin’s darkness will never extinguish God’s light.** Remember that even if we are humanly alone, with God we reside in a majority. There is no reason to be consumed with or motivated out of fear. God has us in His hands. In what way will you choose to stand with God, even if it means standing against the crowd?

We are needy. Despite our best attempts to convince ourselves and others that we are self-sufficient, life reveals our weaknesses at every turn. Elijah had to depend on God to meet his everyday necessities of food and water – the basics of life. God did not provide Elijah with a warehouse of supplies. Instead, He sent him a daily allotment from a source that was visibly inadequate. God’s resources

were only abundant through the eyes of faith. What situation in your life is opening your eyes to your own neediness? How is this awareness of neediness producing spiritual gain in your life? When has God sent you to a humbling place to demonstrate His sufficiency? **God crafts situations in our lives that unveil our needs to teach us to depend on Him.** He dispenses grace and provision in divinely measured doses that satisfy our true needs and give Him glory. God's provisions and guidance usually require ongoing, moment-by-moment dependence on His tender care. We need God. The good news is that He is absolutely sufficient.

Elijah's confidence in God amazes us. His courageous confrontation of the prophets of Baal reveals an almost unbelievable faith and boldness. Was he uniquely gifted? Was he unusually brave? Elijah was a regular person with normal fears and growing faith. In next week's lesson we will see Elijah's very human response to this exhilarating but exhausting encounter. The bottom line is that God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways. God's battles are not won in human strength. Perhaps you think your Christian life is fairly lackluster compared to Elijah's Mount Carmel moment. However, spiritual success is not measured by external fireworks but by a steady heart of obedience and faithfulness. What can you trust God for today as He cares for you spiritually? **God wants to use you in ways for which He has uniquely suited and positioned you.** Follow God wholeheartedly, and trust Him with the results that are uniquely remarkable in your life and circumstances. In what way is God leading you to courageously trust Him?

# Elijah's Crisis and Israel's Calamities

1 Kings 19–21

## Lesson Questions

**First Day: Read Lesson 4 Notes.**

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. What truth from the lecture led you to seek God's presence and help during a challenge this past week?
2. How did the notes help you realize that, like Elijah, God has positioned you to be used for Him? What will you do?

**Second Day: Read 1 Kings 19:1-10.**

*Elijah ran from Jezebel in fear for his life.*

3. What did Elijah experience after his great victory at Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:16-46)?

4. a. How did God care for His exhausted and discouraged servant?  
  
b. In what ways have you experienced God's provisions during a time of need or suffering?
5. What did God ask Elijah at Mount Horeb, and how did Elijah answer?
6. Give lessons that you draw from Elijah's experience.

**Third Day: Read 1 Kings 19:11-21.**

*God lovingly restored Elijah.*

7. a. Describe the ways God revealed Himself to Elijah. What stands out to you?  
  
b. What do you think God intended for Elijah to experience and learn?
8. a. How did God move Elijah forward in work for Him? What did He ask Elijah to do?  
  
b. Why would God's calling of Elisha have been particularly helpful to Elijah?
9. In what specific ways has God called and sustained you in obedience and service for Him?

## Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 20.

*God rescued Ahab and Israel from Ben-Hadad's overpowering army.*

10. Explain how God protected His people and His promises despite their sin.

11. a. What verses clearly state God's purpose in rescuing His people yet again?

b. In what ways have you seen God rescue you?

12. Even after experiencing God's deliverance, what poor decision did Ahab make?

13. a. How did Ahab respond to God's judgment?

b. Tell some of the ways God has used the consequences of your sin to call you to a deeper relationship with Him.

## Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 21.

*Ahab and Jezebel selfishly abused their power.*

14. Describe the character of each of the following persons in this passage:

a. Ahab

b. Jezebel

c. Naboth

15. a. How did God respond to Ahab and Jezebel's evil?

b. How did Ahab respond to God's judgment? Do you think he was sincere?

16. a. Give examples of God's grace from this account.

b. What evidence of God's grace have you experienced this week?

### **Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 19–21.**

*God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.*

17. What attribute of God stands out to you in 1 Kings 19–21? How do you see that attribute displayed in the world today?

*Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 1 Kings 19–21*



# Lesson Notes

## 1 Kings 19–21

### Focus Verse

“The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’” – 1 Kings 19:11a

### Outline

- God’s Generous Grace to a Weary Servant – 1 Kings 19
- God’s Generous Grace to a Rebellious King – 1 Kings 20–21

### Engage

We live in a world that idolizes superheroes. The idea of unfaltering invincibility appeals to us. We like to imagine ourselves stronger than we actually are. So what happens when our human fragility surfaces? Life sometimes leaves us struggling to breathe. We face fears, illness, and the stresses of life. Ongoing pressure leaves us depleted and weary. There is good news. Even though our strength might wane, God’s strength never does! Our Heavenly Father understands our weaknesses better than we do. His own Son walked the soil of earth as a man. **God can be trusted to sustain us when our strength fails.**

Elijah confronted an evil king and rampant idolatry with seemingly superhuman strength. He trusted God in big ways. Yet after a spectacular display of courageous faith, God’s weary servant collapsed. Elijah experienced yet another hue of God’s multicolored faithfulness when his human frailty was exposed. The God who fed him with ravens and sent fire from heaven met him in the pit of despair. God tenderly restored Elijah. He then gave him more work to do. Human limitations do not limit God. Elijah would again stand before rebellious Ahab to deliver God’s message. **God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.** God’s grace is essential. God’s grace is powerful.

## God’s Generous Grace to a Weary Servant – 1 Kings 19

God’s prophet Elijah boldly confronted evil. He crashed into King Ahab’s presence and declared God’s coming judgment in the form of a drought.<sup>1</sup> He called down fire from heaven in a dramatic display of God’s overwhelming power. Elijah slew 450 prophets of Baal.<sup>2</sup> He prayed, then God opened the heavens to send rain on Israel.<sup>3</sup> Elijah had experienced God’s provisions and power in miraculous ways. **Now, after monumental victory, God’s exhausted servant faced a new kind of battle.**

1: Coming drought: 1 Kings 17:1

2: Prophets of Baal: 1 Kings 18:16-40

3: Rain: 1 Kings 18:41-46

# Elijah's Crisis – 19:1-10

## A Weary Servant – 19:1-5a

### Jezebel's Threat – 19:1-2

**God's unmistakable display of power threatened the perceived power of a wicked queen.** The stronghold of evil had been shaken. Jezebel sent a twisted threat to God's faithful but depleted servant, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Surely if Jezebel could send a message to Elijah, she could have ordered his murder immediately. Satan used her threat to torment Elijah with an outcome that God's sovereign plan for him would not allow.

## Elijah's Response – 19:3-5a

**The courageous prophet who had unflinchingly confronted King Ahab was now consumed by debilitating fear.** The man of God who faced down 850 false prophets ran scared at the threat of one woman. Elijah fled first to Beersheba and then to the desert. His journey probably totaled 90 miles (145 kilometers). Alone and defeated, Elijah sat down under the shade of a broom bush, prayed to die, and fell asleep.

Elijah's sudden plunge into despair might surprise us, but his raw humanity should not. The glaringly honest words that poured out of Elijah revealed the depth of his inner strife. "I have had enough, LORD ... Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." **Elijah was just as human as we are.** Like any Christian who has experienced an intense spiritual battle, Elijah was physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. Even though he was drained and defeated, he was honest with God.

Elijah's very real struggle offers many lessons for us. Internal and external pressure, hunger, physical strain, and general weariness can take us to a place where we feel we have nothing left to offer God or anyone else. We face many moments when we have "had enough." **Satan aims his attacks on believers at specific times and points of vulnerability.** Our enemy flings accusations at us with precise cruelty, but he cannot steal the permanent shelter given to us by our God Most High.<sup>4</sup> "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Great victories are often followed by moments of extreme distress. Even great men and women of God face human limitations and discouragement. **By God's grace, His work does not depend on our invincibility.** Seasons of excruciating pain prove to us that we need God. He is sufficient.

## God's Restorative Care – 19:5b-10

### Practical Provisions – 19:5b-9a

Perhaps we are tempted to condemn or criticize Elijah – just a little bit. Had he not just seen God do amazing things? Even though we struggle with the same kind of human limitations that Elijah did, we often expect unrealistic perfection in ourselves and others. God's response to Elijah, however, was restorative and not condemning. He did not rebuke Elijah for unbelief or for forgetting His former

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<sup>4</sup>: Sheltered by God: Psalm 91

care. He did not see Elijah's desperate moment as failure. **God knew Elijah had a false sense of isolation and responded to his human frailty with gentleness and practical help.**

God gave Elijah what he needed – sleep and food. An angel touched sleeping Elijah and gave him bread and water. He ate and drank and lay down again. A second time, the angel awakened him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” **God strengthened Elijah and supplied what he needed most.** The rest and nourishment He provided energized Elijah to travel for 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb. When Elijah arrived there, he entered into a cave to spend the night.

**God completely understands our human limitations.** He is never surprised when we become weary. God knows what is too much for us. We do not have the resources to navigate life or please God on our own. We cannot figure out anything significant without His help. In so many ways, God says, “I know what you really need, and I will give it to you if you trust Me.” Life's darkest moments are designed to teach us to depend on God.

### Honest Confession – 19:9b-10

God's first direct words to Elijah came as a searching question, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” **With gentle purposefulness, God encouraged Elijah to speak to Him concerning his questions, doubts, fears, and deep loneliness.** God lovingly prodded Elijah forward, helping him move beyond his state of paralyzed despair.

Elijah held nothing back. He honestly poured out his utter loss of hope to God. He had been zealous and faithful. The people had rejected God and killed His prophets. **Elijah believed that he was the only one left standing for Almighty God – and now they were trying to kill him.** Elijah's work felt fruitless, and he felt defeated.

## Elijah's Comfort – 19:11-14

God knew just how to minister to His beloved and weary prophet. With clarifying direction, God instructed Elijah to go out on the mountain and get ready – “the LORD is about to pass by.” **With the full force of nature at His bidding, God reminded Elijah of His power with three unmistakable expressions.** In a terrifying and vibrant pageant displaying His power, God first unleashed a great and powerful wind that shattered the rocks on the mountain. Then came an earthquake and then a fire. And yet, God was not in the mighty wind, the forceful earthquake, or the blazing fire.

Elijah's ear heard something else as the noise of nature faded. “And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” He covered his face with his cloak as he stood aware of God's presence. **God's message to Elijah would not be offered in a big noisy way, but in the still, quiet voice of a loving Father.** God tenderly and gently repeated the same question – “What are you doing here, Elijah?” For a second time, Elijah told God of his lonely plight of faithfulness. The sad songs of life can be honestly sung to our Heavenly Father who loves us best. We look for God in the moments of life that are big and loud. What is God whispering to you today?

Elijah's story presents a real picture of the human experience. The uncertainties of life weigh heavily on us. **Our human strength will fail us, but God never does.** In the midst of life's challenges, God welcomes our honest expressions about the depth of our struggles. Only He knows and can meet our deepest needs. We gain strength to carry on as we fix our gaze on the greatness of God rather than the magnitude of our problems. God orchestrates our circumstances to remove our illusion of

strength and help us look to Him. In God's strength alone, we can rise from the hard places in life to carry on and move forward. God does not strengthen us just so we can be strong again. He wants us to re-engage with the work He is doing in the world.

## Elijah's Calling – 19:15-18

God did not allow His faithful servant to remain sidelined but enlisted him with specific work to do. God leads us to know the right next thing to do even when life is hard. **God answered Elijah with clear-cut words of direction and comfort.**

- **Anoint two kings** – Hazael was to be crowned as king of Aram<sup>5</sup> and Jehu as king of Israel.<sup>6</sup>
- **Anoint Elisha as your successor** – God's work among the people of Israel would continue.
- **Be encouraged, you are not alone** – There are 7,000 in Israel who have refused to bow to Baal.

God called Elijah to speak boldly for Him as His prophet in Israel. In a similar way, God calls every Christian to partner with Him in His ongoing work in the world. **God comes alongside believers when they are weak to give them the strength needed to carry on for His purposes and give Him glory.**

On Mount Horeb, God confirmed His control of nations and His sovereignty over His people. **Elijah's work for God was not done.** God assigned Elijah immediate tasks that carried great importance. He would anoint kings to carry forth God's plan for rebellious Israel. King Hazael would come as a bitter enemy. The sword of Jehu would reap vengeance on Israel. Elisha would continue to stand with God and against evil. God's plan for His people was not defeated.

## Elijah's Comrade – 19:19-21

Elijah journeyed to find Elisha, whose home was likely in Abel-Meholah, a significant trip from Mount Horeb. **Elijah found his successor hard at work.** Elisha was plowing and leading a work force involving 12 pairs of oxen.

With his characteristic abruptness, Elijah threw his cloak around Elisha and kept on walking. This was not just any cloak but an official mantle that identified him as a prophet. Evidently, Elisha knew what was happening. He recognized Elijah's action as a call to follow him. **Elisha responded to God's call, and his life was changed forever.** With Elijah's permission, Elisha returned to kiss his parents goodbye. He verified his commitment by slaughtering his oxen and burning the tools of his trade. Elisha held nothing back in his commitment to God.

God had great work in store for Elisha as he became Elijah's servant. Over time, God gave Elisha a powerful ministry of his own. What a privilege he had to walk alongside this renowned prophet of God. Elisha was filled with power to boldly proclaim truth. He performed compassionate miracles in God's name. **God revealed His compassion through the promise that His work would continue as He provided Elisha to walk with Elijah.** The bonds formed by those who work together for the Lord are among life's greatest treasures.

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<sup>5</sup>: King Hazael: 2 Kings 10:32

<sup>6</sup>: Jehu: 2 Kings 9:1-3

# The Painful Path to Spiritual Growth

## The Doctrine of Suffering

**Life in a broken world brings pain in many varieties.** Our human experience can involve physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual distress. Suffering entered the world when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and sin's curse corrupted the natural world, including the people of earth.<sup>7</sup> Some suffering is the direct result of personal or societal sin.<sup>8</sup> Much pain, however, represents the natural consequences of sin's broad damage. Life on planet Earth includes natural disasters, aging bodies, global pandemics, and strained relationships.<sup>9</sup> Grief and anguish regularly invade human lives. Like Elijah, even God's faithful servants suffer.

**Suffering accomplishes God's sovereign and good purposes.**<sup>10</sup> Some of our pain comes as God's loving discipline, to correct and perfect us.<sup>11</sup> Times of suffering often reveal our human limitations and our utter dependence on God. Suffering challenges people to face their own mortality and human limitations, even if they fail to turn to God.

We often struggle to explain the hardship we face. **While we cannot adequately document God's every motive in the suffering He allows, He can be trusted.** The pain that is our regular fare in this fallen world makes us long for the day when Jesus will end sin's devastation and will reign on the earth without rival.<sup>12</sup> The fact that God allows suffering does not mean He does not love us. In the ultimate expression of His love, God allowed His own Son to experience bitter suffering on the cross.<sup>13</sup> Jesus suffered so that all who turn to Him can eagerly anticipate a day when this world's suffering will end.

This world's trouble is difficult to explain without a biblical perspective on suffering's source and purpose. If we do not recognize the relationship between human suffering and sin, we might question God's goodness. **If we fail to recognize God and His redeeming purposes, the pain seems pointless.** We are left with only throbbing pain we must endure but cannot reconcile. Where is the hope without Jesus?

**Your suffering offers a personal invitation to trust the Lord.** Jesus warned that living a countercultural lifestyle in this world would bring suffering. He suffered in ways we cannot fully describe. We are called to seek God's purpose and experience His peace in the midst of our pain. John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." What is the most painful situation you face today? Are you willing to trust God with the pain, even if you cannot explain His purpose in it?

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7: Sin's curse: Genesis 3; Romans 3:10-18; 5:12

8: God's judgment on sin: Joel 2:12-14; Romans 1:18-32

9: Trouble in this world: 1 Peter 1:6-7

10: God's purposes: Isaiah 45:7

11: God's discipline: Genesis 50:19-20; Proverbs 3:12; Romans 5:1-5; 8:28; Philippians 3:7-10

12: Delivered from suffering: Revelation 21:3-5

13: Suffering servant: Isaiah 53

# God's Generous Grace to a Rebellious King – 1 Kings 20–21

God faithfully supported Elijah, but He also persistently reached out to King Ahab and Israel. Ahab reigned 22 years in Israel as an evil king who perpetuated evil in unprecedented ways.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, God continually confronted Ahab, speaking through multiple prophets and demonstrations of His power.

## God's Rescue – 1 Kings 20

### War with Ben-Hadad of Aram – 20:1-34

God sent enemies against Ahab's kingdom to draw His people back to Himself. **Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram (modern-day Syria), formed a powerful coalition of 32 kings and besieged Israel's capital, Samaria.** Ahab agreed to pay a hefty price and even offered some of his own family in an effort to save the city. But when Ben-Hadad demanded full search and seizure of the city, Ahab and his officials refused.

In generous grace, God sent an unnamed prophet with a message for Ahab. He declared that God would give victory over the enemy so that Ahab and his people would know that “I am the LORD.” **Ahab followed God's direction, and his forces decisively triumphed over his enemies in the battle.**

**Despite his undeniable experience of God's deliverance, Ahab valued political and economic gain more than pleasing God.** He not only spared his enemy Ben-Hadad, but he made him a trading partner and ally. This diplomatic human solution came with great future consequences – the Arameans would be back for more battle and bloodshed.<sup>15</sup>

### Warning by God's Prophet – 20:35-43

God continually reached out to Ahab, who persisted in resistance. God delivered a message of judgment to Ahab through a strange encounter with an unnamed prophet. Ahab and his people would serve the death sentence intended for Ben-Hadad due to Ahab's release of this enemy king. God does not overlook sin. The consequences for disobedience remained. Ahab, at this moment, could have chosen repentance. Instead, he returned to his palace in sullen anger. **Serious consequences follow when a hardened human heart fails to respond to God's compassion and grace.**

## God's Judgment – 1 Kings 21

### A Flagrant Sin – 21:1-16

The self-centered values and motives of Ahab and Jezebel erupted into evil actions. Ahab desired a vineyard near his palace that was owned by a man named Naboth. **When Naboth refused Ahab's**

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<sup>14</sup>: Ahab's evil: 1 Kings 16:29-30; 21:25-26

<sup>15</sup>: Future battles: 1 Kings 22:31; 2 Kings 6:8-24

**offer to purchase the land through an exchange or sale, Ahab again returned home sullen and angry.** Naboth stood firmly on the standards in God's law. He had every legal right to refuse to sell the king the land that was his rightful inheritance.<sup>16</sup>

Queen Jezebel noticed Ahab's depressed state as he sulked in bed and refused to eat. She launched an underhanded plan to get the vineyard for Ahab. Naboth was sentenced and stoned to death because of his uncompromised devotion to what was right. Naboth's sons were also killed so that no family remained to inherit the property.<sup>17</sup> **Ahab seized the vineyard in a flagrant and evil abuse of power.** His misdeeds continued to escalate. Psalm 53:4 describes evildoers as those who "devour my people as though eating bread." Ahab's treachery against Naboth did not escape God's notice.

*God, who exercises His unlimited power with purity and perfection, will eventually bring judgment on all those who abuse power and people.*

### A Fearful Warning – 21:17-26

God again sent Elijah to oppose Ahab. Greeted by Ahab as his enemy, Elijah delivered a solemn verdict of judgment. Ahab had provoked God and led Israel astray with his sins of idolatry, oppression, and violence. **The royal dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel would face a disgraceful end.**

The injustice and oppression in our world often cause people to doubt God's power and goodness. Though not all of God's judgment is delivered swiftly, it is nonetheless certain. **God sees everything and hates the exploitation of the weak.**<sup>18</sup> This has never changed. God, who exercises His unlimited power with purity and perfection, will eventually bring judgment on all those who abuse power and people.

### Undeserved Mercy – 21:27-29

Ahab had a position of great influence. **Despite God's clear and repeated calls to Ahab to do what was right, Jezebel spurred her husband on to unrelenting evil.** The fire that fell at Mount Carmel, the decisive rescue in battle, and personal appeals from God had not softened his hard heart. Would anything be different this time?

After Elijah's somber announcement, Ahab put on sackcloth to express sorrow and humility. God pointed Elijah to Ahab's unexpected response. Despite Ahab's record of excessive evil, God acknowledged his fleeting moment of humility. **God extended mercy to the degenerate, murderous, and reprobate King Ahab.** The just consequences of Ahab's sin would not fall until the days of his son. God was amazingly gracious to Ahab himself, though his son was left with the fallout caused by his sin and rebellion.

This passage reveals God's wisdom in dispensing grace. God tenderly dealt with Elijah in a moment of human frailty. God persistently pursued Ahab despite a lifetime of evil. **God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.** We worship a God who delights to show mercy to the undeserving.

16: Naboth's inheritance: Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 26:55-56; 36:7-9

17: Naboth's sons: 2 Kings 9:26

18: Abuse of power: Leviticus 19:33-34; Proverbs 6:16-19; Isaiah 61:8; Amos 2:6-7

# Take to Heart

## Hold Fast

After his dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled in fear when wicked Queen Jezebel vowed to kill him. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah sat under a bush and prayed to die. With compassionate care, the angel of the Lord restored His faithful but weary servant. Elijah honestly poured out his questions and expressed the depths of his personal struggle to God. He had been faithful to God's commands. He was fatigued, and his ministry felt fruitless. He felt forsaken and alone. God revealed His powerful presence and gentle care to Elijah. Commissioned by God to new work, Elijah did the next right thing. He emerged to anoint kings and raised up Elisha as a faithful partner and his successor. **God faithfully cared for Elijah when he faced real human struggles.** Human strength fails, but God's faithfulness prevails.

**King Ahab continued to reject God, despite many opportunities to turn to Him.** Throughout Ahab's reign, God faithfully sent prophets to give direction and timely warnings. Even though Ahab and Israel experienced victory in battle by God's power alone, he continued to serve himself, not God. Ahab's evil only escalated. He abused power and murdered Naboth to steal Naboth's vineyard for his own pleasure. However, evil does not go unchecked. Elijah again stood before this reprobate king to pronounce the end of his kingdom. In response to Ahab's show of humility, the disaster was delayed until the reign of his son. God extends mercy to the undeserving even as He exercises judgment.

## Apply It

**God regularly allows His children opportunities to recognize how much we need Him.** He did this for Elijah. He does it for us. We often resist moments that reveal weakness to ourselves and others. We fail to recognize that we need God just as much on the days we feel strong as on the days we struggle. God exposes our humanness to reveal the truth. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." Our weakness is not news to God. He understands the limitations of the mortals He formed from dust. We, however, struggle to shed our illusion of superpowers. Will you trust that God has made you weak in all the right places to shine His glory through the cracks in your clay pot?<sup>19</sup> What is God revealing as He tenderly teaches you to trust Him? How is God purposefully exposing your weakness to draw you to Himself?

Elijah's story presents lessons for us, but so does Ahab's. **Persistent refusal to yield to God's loving invitations reaps serious consequences.** God revealed His power and accessibility to Ahab by giving him victory in battle. He repeatedly sent His representatives to speak truth to this headstrong king. Surely we would never be as foolish as Ahab! Admittedly however, there are ways we also resist God's loving appeals to us. How can you develop a heart that is sensitive to the Lord and pliable in His hands? The "Ahab factor" at work in us limits our responsiveness to God. Do you recognize the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit? How quickly do you repent when God reveals sin? Lord, soften our hearts and unblock our ears! May God's voice and loving appeals matter more than our pride.

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19: Treasure in clay pot: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

**God's mercy is relentless; His grace flows in a steady stream.**<sup>20</sup> He upholds faithful but frail people like Elijah. God reaches out to obstinate people like Ahab. He avenged the evil inflicted on Naboth. God offers hope and calls us to trust Him. His persistent and loving presence permeates our world and our lives. What specific expressions of God's lavish mercy and generous grace flood your life story? How has God met you this week? What people has God sent to you with timely and customized words of warning or encouragement? God calls us to seek Him and sustains us as we do. The glory is all His. We are but dust. Isaiah 64:8 says it well, "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." God can be trusted to form the dust in you into something beautiful. Will you trust Him?

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<sup>20</sup>: Mercy and grace: Psalm 25:6; Lamentations 3:22-24



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