

Elijah Serve God Alone

The Bible Study

What you will need:

- Bible, pen and note pad for each participant
- A stone to add to the altar - paint the stone white and either paint on a bird (Black) or stick on a cut-out of a bird.
- Sunday school song – “The raven’s wings:” – get group to try and remember it, then sing it and do the actions.
- Song “There is a balm in Gilead” – some may remember this song.



Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." 1 Kings 18:21 (NIV)

1 Kings 16:29 to 2 Kings 2

The name Elijah means, my God is Yahweh. Elijah was a prophet. A simple definition of the word prophet is, "one who divinely inspired to foretell or tell forth the word of God. In the tradition of Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets Elijah was appointed by God to bring His word to the kings.

Elijah in Context

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, became king, the northern tribes revolted. (1 Kings 12) Jeroboam became king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. One of his first big decisions was to establish idol gods shaped like golden calves and set up shrines in pagan high places. He also instituted an alternate festival similar to the Feast of the Tabernacle.

Because Jeroboam caused the people of Israel to turn from God the kingdom was taken from his son Nadab as the prophet Ahijah predicted. Nadab was killed by Baasha. His son Elah became king, but was assassinated by Zimri, who also killed the entire royal family. He reigned only seven days until Omri led the army to depose him. Omri reigned twelve years and moved the capitol to Samaria. His son Ahab became king. He ruled twenty-two years. He married Jezebel. It is said of Ahab that he did more to arouse the anger of God than any other king of Israel. About sixty-two years after the kingdom was torn from the hands of Rehoboam Ahab began to rule. During his rule we are introduced to Elijah. The Prophet Elijah's ministry was mainly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Here is the dramatic introduction to this amazing prophet: "Elijah the Tishbite, of the temporary residents of Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years but according to my word.'" 1 Kings 17:1 (Amplified Version)

Elijah the Prophet was known by many names that were used as descriptions of him. He was also known as Elijah the Tishbite. However, some have concluded that the word Tishbite refers to persons who were born in an area known as Tishbe that is located in the mountains of Gilead in what is now northern Jordan." He was also known as Elijah the Gileadite.

Even though Elijah is not the first prophet found in the Bible, he is the prophet used to symbolize the Prophets as Moses is used to symbolize the Law. Keep in mind that during the Transfiguration of Christ the disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. (Luke 9:28-36, Mark 9:2-10)

Elijah is a prominent figure in Jewish culture. "Each Passover, a special cup of wine is filled and put on the Seder table. During the Seder, the door of the house is opened and everyone stands to allow Elijah the Prophet (*Eliyahu ha-Navi*) to enter and drink. At every *bris*, a chair is also set aside for Elijah. At the conclusion of Shabbat, Jews sing about Elijah, hoping he will come 'speedily, in our days...along with the Messiah, son of David, to redeem us.'"

There are many references to Elijah in the New Testament. In James 5:16-18 we learn that Elijah is "just as human as we are" and he was a mighty man of prayer. The passage refers to him as a righteous man. Many wondered if John Baptist was really Elijah and some even thought maybe Jesus was Elijah. (John 1:19-28, Matthew 6:14) Jesus referred to Elijah in the following verses Matthew 17:10-13, and Luke 4:24-26.

When Jacob gathered up his family and possessions to take leave of Laban and head for his home land, he stopped in the area referred to as Gilead. Laban over took Jacob at a place that was named Galeed and Mizpah because of the heap of stones or stone memorial they set up and called Heap of Testimony. Elijah is associated with the land of Gilead. There is a rich history of that area known today as Jordan or Transjordan. This land was assigned to the Tribes of Ruben, Gad and part of the tribe of Manasseh. Fighting men from these tribes went with the other tribes to help them conquer the Promised Land. When the time came for them to return to their families they built an altar as a memorial to remind the tribes west of the Jordan that they were also part of the nation. The altar was a copy and not a functioning altar. The altar was called Witness. Gilead was a defining moment for Saul's kingship. Gilead was also known for its healing balm. The land was rugged but also good for cattle and the production of olives and grapes. Elijah knew the land well. (Remember we sang the old song "There is a balm in Gilead that heals the sin-sick soul".)

After Elijah made his proclamation to King Ahab, the Lord directed him to go into hiding. He was to go back into the Gilead area. While he was there God sent Ravens to bring him food. Ravens were considered among the birds that could not be eaten. In literature Ravens often symbolize death or harm. Ravens are a very clever bird. They are collectors and use tools. They are mischievous and play games. They were also obedient to God and helped take care of Elijah.

The stream in the Kerith Ravine would dry up in the summer. When it dried up, God instructed Elijah to go to Zarephath of Sidon and stay with a widow. This is a bit of irony as Jezebel's father was the priest king in Sidon. The widow thought she was making her last meal when she went out to gather sticks for her fire that day. She never expected to meet a prophet. Because of her faith and kindness, the widow was rewarded with a supply of flour and oil that would last until the rain came and there was food once again. The widow's son became sick and died, Elijah prayed for him and his life was restored.

After three years of drought, God had Ahab's attention. God sent Elijah to meet with Ahab. Elijah met Obadiah, who was taking care of Ahab's herds. Obadiah was a righteous man of faith who had protected and saved the prophets of the Lord. This must have been good news for Elijah to find out that other prophets of the Lord survived.

Elijah met with King Ahab and told him to summon the people to meet at Mount Carmel to witness a "show down" between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. As everyone assembled, Elijah challenged them to choose once and for all who they would worship. The choice was between God and Baal. The people did not answer him. In 1 Kings 18:22-24 Elijah laid out the challenge and the people agreed to abide by the results. In his challenge he claimed to be the only prophet left, possibly to protect the other surviving prophets.

The prophets of Baal were allowed to choose the bull for their sacrifice and they went first. They shouted, cut themselves and went into a frenzy to get the attention of Baal. There was no response and no answer to their requests. Elijah taunted them and said perhaps they should shout louder as Baal could be off some where relieving himself. This went on all day until the time of the evening sacrifice.

When it was near the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord. We are not told the history of this altar, but there was a significance to it that was not lost on the people of the day. Elijah took twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel even though the Northern Kingdom, Israel, only represented ten tribes. He dug a deep trench around the altar, prepared the wood and the bull. He did a strange thing both because of the time of drought and because it made his job even more difficult. He asked that water be poured on the sacrifice. Once the sacrifice, wood, ground and rocks were soaked and the trench was filled with water Elijah began to pray. God answered his prayer and fire fell from heaven to consume every thing including the rocks and the soil.

When the people saw the fire fall from heaven and consume the sacrifice, they fell prostrate and claimed they believed God was the Lord. Fear induced revival burns hot and quick then dies out. The people killed the prophets of Baal on Elijah's orders. The conversion of the people lasted until the first sign of conflict.

It was now time to pray for rain. Elijah told Ahab to go and enjoy a good meal. We can guess this contest took place in the summer since the sacrifice on the altar of the Lord took place at the customary time for the evening offering and there was still a good amount of daylight left. Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and fell to the ground to pray. He sent his servant to go to look out toward the sea for any sign of rain. The servant returned to say that he did not see anything. Elijah sent the servant seven times. On the seventh time the servant returned to say that he saw a cloud that was about as big as a hand rising up from the sea. Elijah sent him to go and tell Ahab to get moving and head home or he would be stopped by the rain. A heavy wind brought a rainstorm just as predicted. Ahab was heading to Jezereel where his winter palace was located. It was a half way point from Mount Carmel to Samaria. The Bible reports that God gave Elijah extraordinary strength and he ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezereel.

When Ahab got home he told Jezebel all about what happened. Instead of recognizing God's power over Baal and repenting from her idol gods, Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah. For some reason this frightened Elijah and he fled to Beersheba. This place should sound familiar as it is first mentioned as the place where God met Hagar. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob spent a lot of time in this area. Elijah left his servant there and went alone into the desert. It is a common human condition to go into a sort of depression after a spiritual high. Elijah had experienced several spiritual highs the day of the contest between God and Baal. Spiritual highs are emotionally and physically taxing. We learn a lesson from this page in the life of the prophet. That lesson is to make sure we have sufficient time and a place to get refreshed after a time of ministry. When an officer or pastor speaks on Sunday, they need to understand there will be a need to rest and recover the next day. We should expect a spiritual attack after a spiritual high because that is when we are weak. Our prayer partners need to pray for us during and after we minister, especially if it was successful. Elijah slept and was wakened by an angel who told him to eat the food prepared. He slept again until the angel woke him again and told him to get on with his journey. The food sustained him for forty days and gave him enough strength to travel to Mount Sinai. The original Hebrew states that Elijah found *the* cave and spent the night there. There is an emphasis on "*the*" and it is taken to mean the cave where Moses stayed.

The Lord spoke to Elijah and asked, "What are you doing here?" Elijah answered by pouring out his frustration. He heard the Lord direct him to go out and stand on the mountain. He witnessed a mighty wind, an earthquake and a fire, but God did not appear or speak through those huge events. Then a gentle wind blew on Elijah and he heard God speak in a quiet whisper. Once again the Lord asked Elijah why he was there. Once again Elijah poured out his frustration. God then gave Elijah special instructions about anointing the new king for Aram and the new king for Israel. The final instruction was for Elijah to anoint Elisha as his replacement. The name Elisha means Yahweh is my salvation.

Elisha was ploughing a field when Elijah found him. Twelve teams of oxen were ploughing the field. Elisha was with the twelfth team. Elijah went over and threw his cloak over the shoulders of Elisha and Elisha knew he had been chosen. He left the oxen standing and ran to Elijah. He asked for permission to go back and kiss his parent good bye. Elisha went back and made an altar to the Lord from the wood of his plough and slaughtered his oxen. He gave the food to the men who ploughed. Elisha joined Elijah as his assistant.

The next time Elijah's name appears is when he confronts Ahab for allowing Naboth to be killed so that Ahab could have his land. See 1 Kings 21:17-29. He appears again in 2 Kings 1 in a confrontation with Ahab's son and successor Ahaziah. Then in 2 Kings 2 Elijah has a dramatic exit befitting this amazing prophet. Before Elijah is taken away, he asked Elisha what he could do for him. Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. A double portion was the birthright of the oldest son or a successor. He was asking to be Elijah's successor. Elijah cryptically answered Elisha by saying that if he saw him when he was taken, Elisha would become his successor. While they were walking and talking a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire drove between them and separated them. Elijah was taken to heaven by a whirlwind followed by the chariot and horses of fire. Elijah's cloak was left behind for Elisha. He confirmed that he had been chosen to succeed Elijah by dividing the Jordan River just as Elijah had done earlier that day.

There are many insights we can glean from the life of Elijah the Prophet; however as we focus on the altar of this study the main question we need to consider is our relationship with God. We live in a time when many people waver between living a life dedicated to God, and living a life dedicated to other people or things. Anyone or any thing that is put before God is an idol or false god. If God is God, then we must serve Him first and always.

There are a lot more altars mentioned in the Bible. These were spiritually significant physical places where God met with a specific person or people. The altar was a place of sacrifice and of prayer. Altars were set up to remind people of their commitments and a place to bring others to tell them about the encounter with God. The altars are not mystical or magical places they are simply markers and memorials of commitments and covenants. You may have a special physical place where you go to when you need help to connect or reconnect with God. You should be able to look back on your life to see where you made significant commitments to God or finally understood a spiritual revelation. Take time to think of the progress of your life and the figurative memorial altars you built. Physical altars are important but it is more important to realize and remember we have an altar, a spiritual place where we can go at any time and meet with God. Is your altar neglected and in need of repair or well kept and well used? If God is God, then worship Him.

Altar Project

After the Bible Study has been completed go back to the altar and as a group review each stone and remember the story and lessons they represent. Talk about what were the favourite lessons and why those were chosen. Take a picture of each stone. Take a picture of the completed altar.

