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Discover Your Bible Series

Revised
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**ELIJAH AND
ELISHA**

PROPHETS WITH POWER



LEADER GUIDE

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**ELIJAH AND
ELISHA**

PROPHETS WITH POWER




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Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

We thank Deb Fennema for writing the first edition of this study. This revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

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- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Introduction

The Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha served God in the days of some of the most wicked kings of Israel. Their stories are in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, history books in the Bible that describe the reigns of many kings of God's people. In the time of Elijah and Elisha, God's people were split into two monarchies: the kingdom of Israel (consisting of ten tribes) and the kingdom of Judah (two tribes).

Though much remains unknown about the lives of these prophets, most of what we do know centers on miracles they did. God sent Elijah and Elisha to reveal his faithfulness and power during a period when God's people and their leaders wandered far from God and fell deep into sin. The kings of God's people were supposed to study the law of God so that they could live and rule by it, but many of them set up idols of the gods of other nations and worshiped them. These kings preferred to rely on political alliances with other nations rather than relying on God. As a result, Elijah and Elisha often had to warn the kings of Israel to repent or face God's punishment, and, in return, these kings hated the prophets and often tried to kill them.

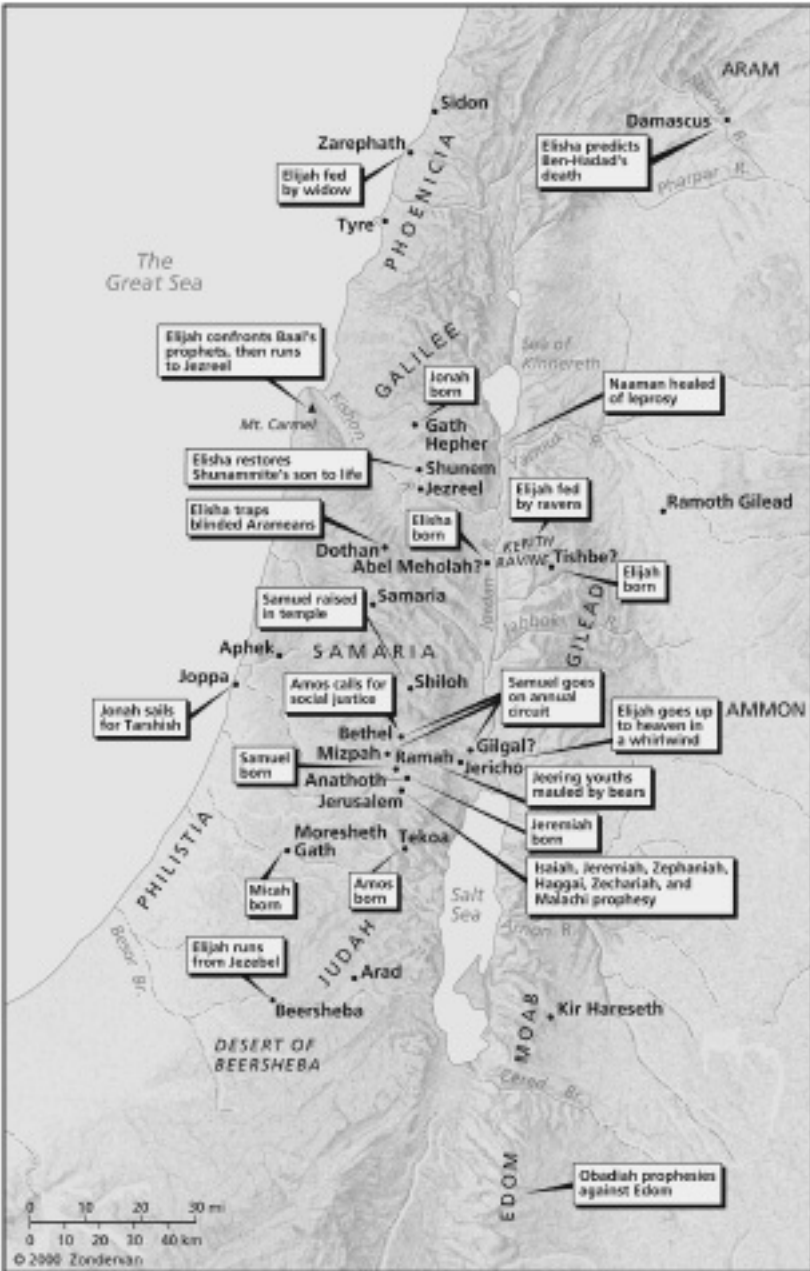
As you can imagine, some of these stories are sad and painful. Human sin sometimes lures people to destroy themselves and the people around them. But these stories are not without hope. Though wicked leaders and the people who followed them had to be punished, there were always some who still worshiped the one true God. Behind the scenes and often through the prophets he sent, God preserved a remnant of his people from whom a righteous Ruler would come. Today we know that this Ruler is Jesus, the Son of God who is also the promised descendant of Israel's King David (see 2 Sam. 7; Jer. 33:14-16; Luke 2:1-14).

We can learn many lessons from these stories about Elijah and Elisha. We learn about God's hatred of sin and generosity in grace. We learn about the faithfulness of believers who stand up for the Lord despite opposition. We also learn about ourselves, as we see people in ancient times struggling with some of the same questions we face:

- Why does God allow bad things to happen to believers?
- Why does living by faith often challenge us to do things for God that we're not used to doing, or things we're not comfortable with?
- Why do evil people seem to prosper?
- Why do we sometimes feel discouraged even when things go well?
- Does God really care about the little details of our lives?

Some of these questions don't have easy answers, but we pray that your study and discussions will help as you explore them together in this Bible study.

The Ministry of Elijah, Elisha, and Other Prophets



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Glossary of Terms

Ahab—one of Israel’s most rebellious and unfaithful kings. Ahab reigned in Israel for almost twenty-two years (874-853 B.C.). He married Jezebel, a worshiper of Baal, who built a temple to Baal in Samaria.

Ahaziah—a son of Ahab who became king of Israel after his father died. The last verse of 1 Kings 22 tells us that Ahaziah worshiped Baal and provoked the Lord to anger, as his father had done. He reigned only about two years, from 853-852 B.C.

Asherah—a Canaanite goddess, or a wooden image representing this goddess. Asherah was worshiped as the sexual companion of the god Baal.

Baal—This name means “master” or “husband” and is used to refer to several Canaanite storm gods. The Baal worshiped at the time of Ahab was probably Baal Melqart, the god of Tyre. Baal is also sometimes called Rimmon (see 2 Kings 5:18). When Ahab married Jezebel, princess of Tyre, she promoted Baal worship in Israel and tried to get rid of the worship of God.

Baal Shalisha—a region west of Gilgal

Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron—this version of the god Baal was one of the most popular gods worshiped by the Philistines, Israel’s longtime enemies in Palestine. The *NIV Study Bible* explains that the name Baal-Zebub “means ‘lord of the flies,’ a deliberate change by followers of the Lord (Yahweh) to ridicule and protest the worship of Baal-Zebul (‘Baal the Prince’), a name known from ancient Canaanite texts.” Ekron, a major city of the Philistines, was located about 25 miles (40 km) west of Jerusalem.

Baasha—a wicked king of Israel who reigned for twenty-four years. He destroyed Jeroboam’s family but also walked “in the ways of Jeroboam and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit” (1 Kings 15:34). As a result, Baasha’s family was also punished (16:1-13).

Ben-Hadad—a king of Aram who often battled and laid siege to Israel during the reigns of Ahab and his son Joram (1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 3:1; 5:1; 6:8, 24). Scholars note that this was Ben-Hadad II in the line of Aramean kings. He was later murdered by Hazael (2 Kings 8:7-15).

Bethel—an important city in the history of Israel. Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) had a vision of God at this site, receiving a promise that God would watch over him and never leave him. So Jacob set up a pillar there and named the place Bethel, which means “house of God” (Gen. 28:10-19; 35:14-15). Later in Israelite history the people set up the Lord’s tabernacle (tent) for the ark of the covenant at Bethel, making it

the site of God's presence in the land (Judg. 20:26-28). After the kingdom split into ten northern tribes (Israel) and two southern tribes (Judah), King Jeroboam of Israel again made Bethel a center for worship, setting up a golden calf there to be worshiped as God (1 Kings 12:28-29).

company of the prophets—a community of believers dedicated to experiencing God and preserving faith in the midst of Israel's widespread unfaithfulness. The *NIV Study Bible* notes that "the relationship of the Lord's great prophets (such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha) to these communities was understandably a close one," with these prophets "probably being their spiritual mentors." Further, "during the days of Elijah and Elisha, companies of prophets were located at Bethel [2 Kings 2:3], Jericho (v. 5), and Gilgal (4:38)."

double portion—the measure of inheritance given to a family's eldest son, who then also became responsible for the welfare of his father's dependents and related property. Other sons each received half as much as the eldest. (See Deut. 21:15-17.)

elders—leaders of the city, venerated for wisdom that comes with age and life experience.

Elijah—the Old Testament prophet sent by God to oppose Baal worship among God's people. In particular, Elijah stood against King Ahab and his rebellious family for their worship of Baal and other false gods. Kings and priests in Israel were supposed to serve as official representatives of the Lord, leading the people in faithfulness to God. But since the days of Jeroboam that had not happened in Israel, reports the *NIV Study Bible*; so "the Lord sent Elijah (and after him Elisha) to serve as his representative (instead of king and priest), much as Moses had done long ago." Elijah's name means "the LORD is my God."

Elisha—the prophet who carried on the work of Elijah in Israel, bringing God's Word to the people. Elisha's name means "God is salvation" or "God saves," describing the essence of his ministry.

Gilgal—see **company of the prophets**.

Hazael—God used this murderous king of Aram to punish Israel for its unfaithfulness (2 Kings 8:7-15, 28-29; 10:32-33; 13:3, 22-23). Hazael murdered King Ben-Hadad of Aram (8:15) and was succeeded by a son who was also named Ben-Hadad (13:24).

Hittites—descendants of an ancient Hittite empire that flourished before 1200 B.C. These people lived in city-state kingdoms mainly to the north of Aram.

Horeb (Mount Horeb)—also called Mount Sinai, this peak is located in the desert about 250 miles (400 kilometers) south of Beersheba. At Mount

Sinai, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-2) and gave his people the Ten Commandments (Ex. 19-20). The people also camped there for about two years to become established as a nation under God's covenant with them (Num. 10:11-13; Deut. 1:6; 5:2). Elijah traveled to this place while fleeing from Jezebel for his life (1 Kings 19:3-8).

Israel—the name commonly used in the Bible to refer to God's chosen people, the descendants of Jacob (whom God renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28). This name originally referred to all twelve tribes descended from the sons of Jacob, but after 930 B.C., when the kingdom split into ten northern tribes and two southern tribes, the name usually referred to the ten northern tribes. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, became known as the kingdom of Judah.

Jehoshaphat—a king of Judah who reigned during the time of Ahab and his sons. He was considered a faithful, godly king (1 Kings 22:41-44), but he became connected with Ahab's family through the marriage of his son and a daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:16-19, 25-27). On at least two occasions Jehoshaphat helped Ahab and his son Joram fight against their enemies (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 3).

Jehu—a commander of Israel's army who was anointed king in order to bring God's punishment on the remaining family of Ahab (2 Kings 9:1-10).

Jericho—formerly an ancient Canaanite city that was destroyed when the Lord first led the Israelites into the promised land (Josh. 6). At that time Joshua pronounced a curse against anyone who planned to rebuild the city. About 550 years later, during the reign of Ahab, "Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho" at the cost of his firstborn and youngest sons, "in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua" (1 Kings 16:34). During the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, a company of the prophets took up residence there (2 Kings 2:5, 15).

Jeroboam—first king of the northern kingdom of Israel (ten tribes). He set up two golden calves for the people to worship, saying, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). For these and other sins against God and the people, Jeroboam and his family were punished (14:1-20; 15:25-30).

Jezebel—wife of Ahab and daughter of a priest-king of Tyre and Sidon. She promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah, her father's gods, in the land of Israel and tried to kill all of God's prophets.

Jezeel—a city about 22 miles (35 kilometers) southeast of Mount Carmel and about the same distance north of Samaria. Ahab kept a second palace there (see 1 Kings 21:1).

Jordan River—well known as the river that stopped flowing so that the people of Israel could cross on dry ground when they entered the

promised land (Josh. 3-4). Elijah and Elisha also crossed the Jordan on dry ground on the day Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind and Elisha became his successor as prophet of the Lord (2 Kings 2:7-14).

Judah—the name commonly used to refer to the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) of the divided kingdom of Israel. See **Israel**.

Mount Carmel—The Hebrew word for *Carmel* (*karmel*) means “fertile land” or “fruitful land,” describing the lush vegetation on this mountain ridge near the Mediterranean Sea.

Obadiah—This Hebrew name meaning “servant of the LORD” is given to at least twelve men in the Old Testament. Scholars suggest that an ancient seal that reads “To Obadiah servant of the King” may have belonged to the administrator of Ahab’s palace (see 1 Kings 18:3).

Philistines—longtime enemies of Israel, these people occupied the land near the Mediterranean Sea to the west of Judah.

sackcloth—coarse cloth usually made from the hair of goats and worn as a sign of mourning or repentance. It was usually worn next to the skin and occasionally as a robe.

sacred stone—a stone pillar that represented an idol god. God prohibited the use of sacred stones in Exodus 23:24 and Leviticus 26:1.

Samaria—capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. This name sometimes also describes the entire region of the northern kingdom.

seah—a measure equaling about 7 quarts (7.3 L).

shekel—a monetary unit weighing about 2/5 of an ounce (11 g).

talent—a monetary unit weighing about 75 pounds (34 kg).

Lesson 1

1 Kings 17

Power over Life and Death

Additional Related Scriptures

Deuteronomy 10:12-19

1 Kings 16:31; 18:16

2 Kings 4; 13:21

Isaiah 55:6-11

Luke 7:11-17; 8:53-56

1 Corinthians 15

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

James 5:16-18

Introductory Notes

Ahab was king of Israel from 874-853 B.C. The verses preceding this chapter tell us that Ahab “did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him” (1 Kings 16:33). Ahab married Jezebel, who worshiped Baal, a false god of fertility and crops who was believed to control the weather. Ahab followed his wife in worshiping Baal. He also set up Asherah poles, dedicated to a goddess associated with Baal. Elijah, the prophet of God, appears on the scene with little introduction.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

Have you ever known someone who made a surprising recovery or just barely avoided a disaster? What did you learn from that person’s experience?

1. *1 Kings 17:1-6*

- a. *What do we learn about Elijah in these verses?*
- b. *What does Elijah tell Ahab?*

The Bible tells us very little about Elijah’s background. He comes from Tishbe, in Gilead, a land on the east side of the Jordan River (see map). Scholars note that the exact location of Tishbe is unknown today. In Hebrew the name *Elijah* means “the LORD is my God.”

Elijah tells King Ahab that according to “the LORD, the God of Israel,” there will be no rain or dew in the land for the next few years.

- **Why might God withhold the rain?**
- **Why might a drought be suitable punishment for Baal worship?**

Invite group members to look up *Baal* in the glossary. A drought would show the Israelites that it was useless to worship a storm god.

In this scene Elijah is also declaring his allegiance to God in contrast to Ahab. The *NIV Study Bible* notes that the phrase “whom I serve” (1 Kings 17:1) means literally “before whom I stand”—and this is “a technical expression indicating one who stands in the service of a king.” In other words, this expression was supposed to apply to the king of Israel, who was to be God’s representative. But because “Ahab’s promotion of Baal worship” led to a great crisis in the people’s devotion to God, “the Lord sent Elijah (and after him Elisha) to serve as his representative.”

Certainly Ahab notices these words. Later his dislike for Elijah comes out clearly (1 Kings 18:16). Ahab also likely understands the reason for the drought.

c. *How does the Lord provide for Elijah?*

- **What does God tell Elijah, and how does Elijah respond?**

When God tells Elijah to go and hide in the Kerith Ravine to be fed by ravens, Elijah obeys. God sends ravens with meat and bread every morning and evening, and God keeps water flowing in the brook at the ravine.

- **How is Elijah’s absence from Israel symbolic of God’s judgment?**

Scholars suggest that God has removed his representative from among the people to separate them from God’s word and blessings. The *NIV Study Bible* notes, “The absence of the prophet confirmed and intensified the judgment.” All of this indicates God’s displeasure with Ahab’s wickedness.

2. *1 Kings 17:7-12*

a. *Where does the Lord tell Elijah to go next? Why?*

- **Why does the brook dry up?**

When the brook dries up because of the drought, God tells Elijah to go to the town of Zarephath and stay there. God says he has commanded a widow there to supply Elijah with food. Zarephath is a small town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea between Tyre and Sidon, where Jezebel’s father ruled. Note together the irony of being sent away from Israel to be cared for in the area ruled by Jezebel’s father (see 1 Kings 16:31).

b. *Describe the widow's situation.*

- **What is the widow doing as Elijah approaches the city?**
- **What does Elijah ask her to do?**

c. *How does she respond to Elijah?*

The widow is gathering sticks near the city gate. Elijah asks her for some water and a piece of bread. She is willing to bring Elijah some water, but she says she has no bread. She explains that she is planning to make a final meal for herself and her son with the last of their food. In the midst of the great drought that has withered the whole region, her outlook is grim, and she believes they will soon starve to death. God had told Elijah that this woman would supply him with food, but she mentions no awareness of this.

- **How does the widow refer to God?**
- **How does she know about Elijah's God?**

The widow speaks an oath in the name of Elijah's God. She may have recognized that Elijah was an Israelite—and the God of Israel was well known, considering that the kingdom of David and Solomon had closely bordered this area about fifty years earlier (until 930 B.C.). In her homeland, however, people worshiped many gods, so the widow may have worshiped the Lord in addition to other gods, or she may actually have worshiped the true God alone.

3. *1 Kings 17:13-16*

a. *What message does Elijah bring from the Lord?*

b. *How does the Lord provide for Elijah and the woman?*

Elijah offers comfort and support as he tells the widow to do as she has planned but to provide first for his needs. He also promises that the Lord will provide abundantly for her. As the *NIV Study Bible* puts it, "Elijah's words are the command of the Lord," but "the demand of the covenant [Lord] is not given without the promise of the covenant."

- **Why might Elijah ask her to do things in this order?**
- **How does this test her faith?**

- **Do you think this would be easy for her to do? Would it be easier if she didn't have her son to consider?**

The widow must act on faith before seeing the miracle of God's provision. Acting in faith can be difficult, especially with a child to care for.

- **What happens as the widow obeys Elijah's instructions?**

As she obeys, God supplies her with oil and flour.

- **What lesson does the widow learn from God's provision?**
- **Who benefits from God's abundant resources?**

God calls for obedience and promises to bless people who obey and serve him. The widow, who does not belong to the nation of God's people, learns about God's providence for those who act in faith. This story shows that God provides for people of other nations as well as his own covenant people. If you have time, read Deuteronomy 10:12-19 together, noting God's love and care for people of all nations in addition to Israel.

4. *1 Kings 17:17-24*

a. *To what does the woman attribute her son's death?*

- **How does the son's illness progress?**

The son becomes ill, grows sicker and sicker, and finally stops breathing.

- **What might she mean by calling Elijah "man of God" in verse 18?**
- **Whom does she blame for the illness?**

The widow associates Elijah with his God and may be trying to distance herself from Elijah in this moment of doubt. In her grief, she asks whether her son has died as a punishment for her sin. Perhaps she has been worshiping other gods even though she has learned about the true God. Perhaps she thinks she has drawn too close to the God who knows her personal sins.

The widow then asks if Elijah has come to bring God's judgment on her, probably assuming that God is working out judgment through Elijah's presence (perhaps as a curse). The *NIV Study Bible* adds, "Although her sense of guilt seems to have been influenced by pagan ideas, both she and Elijah are confronted with the question: Why did the God who promised life bring death instead?"

b. *How is her son's life restored?*

Elijah asks the widow to give him her son, and he carries the boy to an upper room in the house.

- **What does Elijah cry to the Lord?**

Elijah questions God, asking, "Have you brought tragedy . . . upon this widow . . . ?" This shows that even a person of great faith can be baffled by God at times, wondering what God's purpose might be in allowing or causing certain events in this world.

- **What does Elijah do next?**

Elijah stretches out over the boy's body and prays to God. Elijah asks God to return the boy's life to him, perhaps especially to show that the word of God is trustworthy and true.

After listening to Elijah's prayers, the Lord restores the boy's life.

c. *How does the widow respond?*

- **Can you imagine the mother's joy?**
- **Why would this miracle have reassured Elijah as well as the boy's mother?**

The widow states that she now knows Elijah is truly a prophet of God. Her son's return to life convinces her that Elijah has spoken the truth. From Elijah's perspective, this miracle also confirms his standing as God's prophet, reassuring him that God hears his prayers even when Elijah might be confused about God's ways. (See Isa. 55:6-11; James 5:16-18.) What's more, any others who heard about this miracle would know that God was with Elijah in a powerful way. Up to this point in the history of God's people, no one else had been involved in bringing a dead person back to life.

d. *Why do you think God first saved the lives of the widow and her son by providing oil for them and then allowed the boy to die?*

- **Why do you think God used such a difficult lesson?**

Listen carefully to group members as they respond to this question. It's one of the questions people ask when they wonder about the existence of a loving God. Both the widow and the prophet Elijah are now witnesses of God's power over life and death, and this event has likely increased their

trust in God. Take your discussion a bit further by posing some questions like these:

- **Is it harder to trust God through one crisis or through several? Which would strengthen a person's faith more?**
 - **Does God provide comfort in times of grief? Why might that be a valuable lesson to learn?**
- e. *How does this miracle reveal a power of God that is different from God's provision of oil?*

When Elijah first came to Zarephath, God prevented death by starvation; now God has shown the power to bring a person back to life after death.

- **What future event does this miracle prepare us for?**

This resurrection miracle, along with others done through Elisha (2 Kings 4; 13:21), prefigures Jesus' miracles of raising people from the dead (Luke 7:11-17; 8:53-56). All of these point ultimately to Jesus' own resurrection, through which we are promised that all the dead will also rise when Jesus comes again at the end of time (1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Questions for Reflection

Have there been times in your life when you've been challenged to obey God in faith? What was the outcome?

Why do you think God asks us to take steps of faith without knowing the outcome?

Have there been times in your life when your faith has grown because of God's help? Has your faith also grown at times when God allowed something bad to happen? Explain.

Use these questions to review the Scriptures you've discussed in this lesson and to invite group members to share insights they've discovered. Hopefully your group will focus on the amazing provision and power of God, who loves all people and calls us all to trust in him. Be alert for signs that group members may be struggling to accept God's purposes in this world, especially with regard to suffering and death. Invite any who may have further questions to stay and talk, if they wish.

Invite group members to participate in a closing prayer by offering brief sentence prayers of thanks to God, if you think everyone would be comfortable doing so. If your group includes a number of newcomers,

simply offer a brief prayer of thanks for the Scriptures you've studied together—passages that offer us great promise and hope as they reveal God's love and care.

In addition, pray for persons who think their sins are too big for God to forgive, as well as for people who disobey God and mislead others into sin. Ask God to rekindle awe, gratitude, and a desire to live for the Lord—as we are all created to do (Isa. 43:5-7; 1 Cor. 10:31; Eph. 2:10).

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STUDY GUIDE

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

We thank Deb Fennema for writing the first edition of this study. This revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions. If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or if you would like more information on how to start a small group Bible study,

- write to Discover Your Bible at

2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

or

P.O. Box 5070
STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.SmallGroupMinistries.org (for training advice and general information)
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Introduction

The Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha served God in the days of some of the most wicked kings of Israel. Their stories are in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, history books in the Bible that describe the reigns of many kings of God's people. In the time of Elijah and Elisha, God's people were split into two monarchies: the kingdom of Israel (consisting of ten tribes) and the kingdom of Judah (two tribes).

Though much remains unknown about the lives of these prophets, most of what we do know centers on miracles they did. God sent Elijah and Elisha to reveal his faithfulness and power during a period when God's people and their leaders wandered far from God and fell deep into sin. The kings of God's people were supposed to study the law of God so that they could live and rule by it, but many of them set up idols of the gods of other nations and worshiped them. These kings preferred to rely on political alliances with other nations rather than relying on God. As a result, Elijah and Elisha often had to warn the kings of Israel to repent or face God's punishment, and, in return, these kings hated the prophets and often tried to kill them.

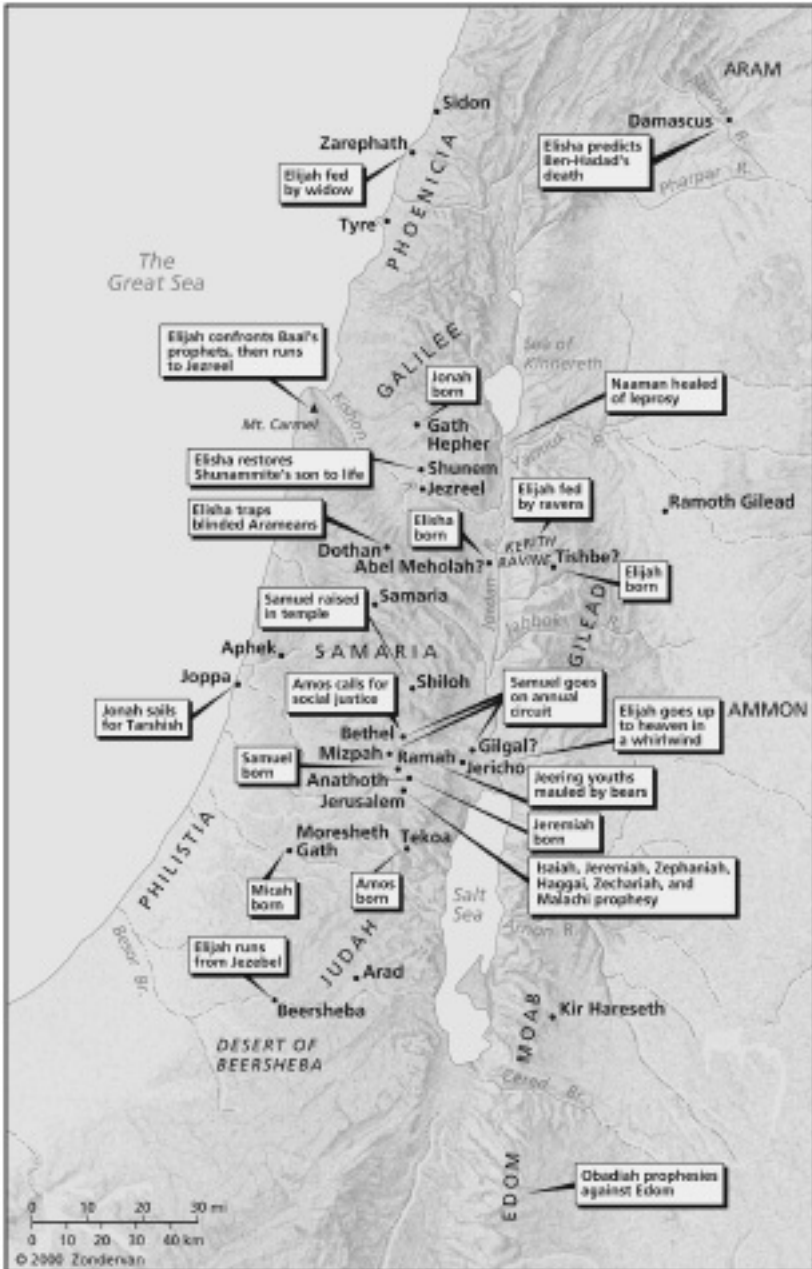
As you can imagine, some of these stories are sad and painful. Human sin sometimes lures people to destroy themselves and the people around them. But these stories are not without hope. Though wicked leaders and the people who followed them had to be punished, there were always some who still worshiped the one true God. Behind the scenes and often through the prophets he sent, God preserved a remnant of his people from whom a righteous Ruler would come. Today we know that this Ruler is Jesus, the Son of God who is also the promised descendant of Israel's King David (see 2 Sam. 7; Jer. 33:14-16; Luke 2:1-14).

We can learn many lessons from these stories about Elijah and Elisha. We learn about God's hatred of sin and generosity in grace. We learn about the faithfulness of believers who stand up for the Lord despite opposition. We also learn about ourselves, as we see people in ancient times struggling with some of the same questions we face:

- Why does God allow bad things to happen to believers?
- Why does living by faith often challenge us to do things for God that we're not used to doing, or things we're not comfortable with?
- Why do evil people seem to prosper?
- Why do we sometimes feel discouraged even when things go well?
- Does God really care about the little details of our lives?

Some of these questions don't have easy answers, but we pray that your study and discussions will help as you explore them together in this Bible study.

The Ministry of Elijah, Elisha, and Other Prophets



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Glossary of Terms

Ahab—one of Israel’s most rebellious and unfaithful kings. Ahab reigned in Israel for almost twenty-two years (874-853 B.C.). He married Jezebel, a worshiper of Baal, who built a temple to Baal in Samaria.

Ahaziah—a son of Ahab who became king of Israel after his father died. The last verse of 1 Kings 22 tells us that Ahaziah worshiped Baal and provoked the Lord to anger, as his father had done. He reigned only about two years, from 853-852 B.C.

Asherah—a Canaanite goddess, or a wooden image representing this goddess. Asherah was worshiped as the sexual companion of the god Baal.

Baal—This name means “master” or “husband” and is used to refer to several Canaanite storm gods. The Baal worshiped at the time of Ahab was probably Baal Melqart, the god of Tyre. Baal is also sometimes called Rimmon (see 2 Kings 5:18). When Ahab married Jezebel, princess of Tyre, she promoted Baal worship in Israel and tried to get rid of the worship of God.

Baal Shalisha—a region west of Gilgal

Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron—this version of the god Baal was one of the most popular gods worshiped by the Philistines, Israel’s longtime enemies in Palestine. The *NIV Study Bible* explains that the name Baal-Zebub “means ‘lord of the flies,’ a deliberate change by followers of the Lord (Yahweh) to ridicule and protest the worship of Baal-Zebul (‘Baal the Prince’), a name known from ancient Canaanite texts.” Ekron, a major city of the Philistines, was located about 25 miles (40 km) west of Jerusalem.

Baasha—a wicked king of Israel who reigned for twenty-four years. He destroyed Jeroboam’s family but also walked “in the ways of Jeroboam and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit” (1 Kings 15:34). As a result, Baasha’s family was also punished (16:1-13).

Ben-Hadad—a king of Aram who often battled and laid siege to Israel during the reigns of Ahab and his son Joram (1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 3:1; 5:1; 6:8, 24). Scholars note that this was Ben-Hadad II in the line of Aramean kings. He was later murdered by Hazael (2 Kings 8:7-15).

Bethel—an important city in the history of Israel. Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) had a vision of God at this site, receiving a promise that God would watch over him and never leave him. So Jacob set up a pillar there and named the place Bethel, which means “house of God” (Gen. 28:10-19; 35:14-15). Later in Israelite history the people set up the Lord’s tabernacle (tent) for the ark of the covenant at Bethel, making it

the site of God's presence in the land (Judg. 20:26-28). After the kingdom split into ten northern tribes (Israel) and two southern tribes (Judah), King Jeroboam of Israel again made Bethel a center for worship, setting up a golden calf there to be worshiped as God (1 Kings 12:28-29).

company of the prophets—a community of believers dedicated to experiencing God and preserving faith in the midst of Israel's widespread unfaithfulness. The *NIV Study Bible* notes that "the relationship of the Lord's great prophets (such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha) to these communities was understandably a close one," with these prophets "probably being their spiritual mentors." Further, "during the days of Elijah and Elisha, companies of prophets were located at Bethel [2 Kings 2:3], Jericho (v. 5), and Gilgal (4:38)."

double portion—the measure of inheritance given to a family's eldest son, who then also became responsible for the welfare of his father's dependents and related property. Other sons each received half as much as the eldest. (See Deut. 21:15-17.)

elders—leaders of the city, venerated for wisdom that comes with age and life experience.

Elijah—the Old Testament prophet sent by God to oppose Baal worship among God's people. In particular, Elijah stood against King Ahab and his rebellious family for their worship of Baal and other false gods. Kings and priests in Israel were supposed to serve as official representatives of the Lord, leading the people in faithfulness to God. But since the days of Jeroboam that had not happened in Israel, reports the *NIV Study Bible*; so "the Lord sent Elijah (and after him Elisha) to serve as his representative (instead of king and priest), much as Moses had done long ago." Elijah's name means "the LORD is my God."

Elisha—the prophet who carried on the work of Elijah in Israel, bringing God's Word to the people. Elisha's name means "God is salvation" or "God saves," describing the essence of his ministry.

Gilgal—see **company of the prophets**.

Hazael—God used this murderous king of Aram to punish Israel for its unfaithfulness (2 Kings 8:7-15, 28-29; 10:32-33; 13:3, 22-23). Hazael murdered King Ben-Hadad of Aram (8:15) and was succeeded by a son who was also named Ben-Hadad (13:24).

Hittites—descendants of an ancient Hittite empire that flourished before 1200 B.C. These people lived in city-state kingdoms mainly to the north of Aram.

Horeb (Mount Horeb)—also called Mount Sinai, this peak is located in the desert about 250 miles (400 kilometers) south of Beersheba. At Mount

Sinai, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-2) and gave his people the Ten Commandments (Ex. 19-20). The people also camped there for about two years to become established as a nation under God's covenant with them (Num. 10:11-13; Deut. 1:6; 5:2). Elijah traveled to this place while fleeing from Jezebel for his life (1 Kings 19:3-8).

Israel—the name commonly used in the Bible to refer to God's chosen people, the descendants of Jacob (whom God renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28). This name originally referred to all twelve tribes descended from the sons of Jacob, but after 930 B.C., when the kingdom split into ten northern tribes and two southern tribes, the name usually referred to the ten northern tribes. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, became known as the kingdom of Judah.

Jehoshaphat—a king of Judah who reigned during the time of Ahab and his sons. He was considered a faithful, godly king (1 Kings 22:41-44), but he became connected with Ahab's family through the marriage of his son and a daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:16-19, 25-27). On at least two occasions Jehoshaphat helped Ahab and his son Joram fight against their enemies (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 3).

Jehu—a commander of Israel's army who was anointed king in order to bring God's punishment on the remaining family of Ahab (2 Kings 9:1-10).

Jericho—formerly an ancient Canaanite city that was destroyed when the Lord first led the Israelites into the promised land (Josh. 6). At that time Joshua pronounced a curse against anyone who planned to rebuild the city. About 550 years later, during the reign of Ahab, "Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho" at the cost of his firstborn and youngest sons, "in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua" (1 Kings 16:34). During the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, a company of the prophets took up residence there (2 Kings 2:5, 15).

Jeroboam—first king of the northern kingdom of Israel (ten tribes). He set up two golden calves for the people to worship, saying, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). For these and other sins against God and the people, Jeroboam and his family were punished (14:1-20; 15:25-30).

Jezebel—wife of Ahab and daughter of a priest-king of Tyre and Sidon. She promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah, her father's gods, in the land of Israel and tried to kill all of God's prophets.

Jezeel—a city about 22 miles (35 kilometers) southeast of Mount Carmel and about the same distance north of Samaria. Ahab kept a second palace there (see 1 Kings 21:1).

Jordan River—well known as the river that stopped flowing so that the people of Israel could cross on dry ground when they entered the promised land (Josh. 3-4). Elijah and Elisha also crossed the Jordan on dry ground on the day Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind and Elisha became his successor as prophet of the Lord (2 Kings 2:7-14).

Judah—the name commonly used to refer to the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) of the divided kingdom of Israel. See **Israel**.

Mount Carmel—The Hebrew word for *Carmel* (*karmel*) means “fertile land” or “fruitful land,” describing the lush vegetation on this mountain ridge near the Mediterranean Sea.

Obadiah—This Hebrew name meaning “servant of the LORD” is given to at least twelve men in the Old Testament. Scholars suggest that an ancient seal that reads “To Obadiah servant of the King” may have belonged to the administrator of Ahab’s palace (see 1 Kings 18:3).

Philistines—longtime enemies of Israel, these people occupied the land near the Mediterranean Sea to the west of Judah.

sackcloth—coarse cloth usually made from the hair of goats and worn as a sign of mourning or repentance. It was usually worn next to the skin and occasionally as a robe.

sacred stone—a stone pillar that represented an idol god. God prohibited the use of sacred stones in Exodus 23:24 and Leviticus 26:1.

Samaria—capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. This name sometimes also describes the entire region of the northern kingdom.

seah—a measure equaling about 7 quarts (7.3 L).

shekel—a monetary unit weighing about 2/5 of an ounce (11 g).

talent—a monetary unit weighing about 75 pounds (34 kg).

Lesson 1

1 Kings 17

Power over Life and Death

Additional Related Scriptures

Deuteronomy 10:12-19

1 Kings 16:31; 18:16

2 Kings 4; 13:21

Isaiah 55:6-11

Luke 7:11-17; 8:53-56

1 Corinthians 15

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

James 5:16-18

Introductory Notes

Ahab was king of Israel from 874-853 B.C. The verses preceding this chapter tell us that Ahab “did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him” (1 Kings 16:33). Ahab married Jezebel, who worshiped Baal, a false god of fertility and crops who was believed to control the weather. Ahab followed his wife in worshiping Baal. He also set up Asherah poles, dedicated to a goddess associated with Baal. Elijah, the prophet of God, appears on the scene with little introduction.

1. *1 Kings 17:1-6*

a. What do we learn about Elijah in these verses?

b. What does Elijah tell Ahab?

c. How does the Lord provide for Elijah?

2. *1 Kings 17:7-12*

- a. Where does the Lord tell Elijah to go next? Why?

- b. Describe the widow's situation.

- c. How does she respond to Elijah?

3. *1 Kings 17:13-16*

- a. What message does Elijah bring from the Lord?

- b. How does the Lord provide for Elijah and the woman?

Questions for Reflection

Have there been times in your life when you've been challenged to obey God in faith? What was the outcome?

Why do you think God asks us to take steps of faith without knowing the outcome?

Have there been times in your life when your faith has grown because of God's help? Has your faith also grown at times when God allowed something bad to happen? Explain.



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