



God Visits Elijah

Called by God

About the Story

In the daily readings last week we have seen the action unfold, leading us to our reading today. First, after King Solomon built the temple, it was not long before he started to disobey God and let the worship of other gods creep into Israel. When Solomon died, the kingdom of Israel split in two. His son, Rehoboam, was to follow his father, but ten of the northern tribes of Israel did not accept him as king. Instead, they elected their own king, one of Solomon's superintendents named Jeroboam.

Fast-forward a few generations, and the northern kingdom of Israel is ruled by King Ahab. Much like the phrase "those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it," Ahab soon begins to allow the worship of other gods in Israel, namely, a god named Baal. Elijah, a great prophet, confronts Ahab, but Ahab does not listen. Elijah then proposes a public test of Baal by having 450 of Baal's prophets attempt to perform miracles. The prophets of Baal set up an altar. They pray to Baal for fire to light the altar, to no avail.

Elijah builds an altar to the Lord, and then asks that the altar be drenched in water. He prays to God and then fire falls from the sky, consuming the water, the sacrifice, and the entire altar. Vindicated, Elijah then has the false prophets killed.

Ahab's queen, Jezebel, is enraged that Elijah made a fool of and killed the prophets. She orders that Elijah be killed. Elijah, scared for his life, runs away into the wilderness. That is where we come in today. God had just performed all these miraculous signs, and even provides for Elijah in the wilderness.

If this were a big budget Hollywood movie, we would expect the rising action to keep climbing to a huge, spectacular climax. But that is not how God works. Instead, God comes to Elijah in the most unexpected way. God comes to us in unexpected places too, just like in the quiet of the night when God called to Samuel, or when God called Samuel to look past appearances when he selected King David.

The Point:

God sometimes chooses to come in quiet ways. This story takes place directly after many amazing and wonderful signs by God. But then, when we least expect it, God comes to Elijah in the silence that follows. Often times in our lives we come to expect God to show us signs. We are encouraged by stories of big miracles. But God's presence is with us always, both in the big and small things. Sometimes, it is in the small things when we are most surprised by God's message for us.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we learned that God called King Solomon to build a temple that would serve as a promise of God's presence with God's people. In today's lesson, we learn about the prophet Elijah finding that God is present with him in an unexpected way. Next week, we will learn that God's presence brings righteousness and justice.

Opening Prayer

God of wonder, you continue to come to us in surprising ways. Help us to see you where we least expect it: in the silence, in the sighs too deep for words, in the faces of those in need, in the body of a man hung on the cross. Provide for us and for all people as you did for Elijah in the wilderness, inspire us as you did Elijah to boldly proclaim your good news to all the world. We pray all of this through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Into the Story

Brainstorm all the ways that God appears to people in the Bible, such as in the burning bush to Moses, in a pillar of cloud and fire to Israel, as a dove during Jesus' baptism. See how many different ways that your group can come up with!

Learning the Story

Elijah runs away from certain death, and God provides for him in the wilderness. Then, a great wind, earthquake, and fire lead us to think that God will appear, but it is in the silence that follows where God speaks to Elijah, calling him to continue to do God's work in the world.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-3 – The Plot Against Elijah

- ❓ If killing is breaking the laws of God, why did Elijah, a prophet of God, kill the prophets of Baal?
- ❓ Why does Jezebel want Elijah killed?
- ❓ If God just protected Elijah from the prophets of Baal and performed such great miracles, why do you think Elijah worried about God protecting him from Jezebel?

Read 1 Kings 19:4-9a – God Provides for Elijah in the Wilderness

- ❓ Why do you think Elijah was ready to give up?
- ❓ Who appeared to Elijah when he gave up in the wilderness?
- ❓ Share a time that God has provided for you, particularly when it was unexpected.
- ❓ Does God use us to provide for others? How so?

Read 1 Kings 19:9b-13 – God Appears to Elijah in an Unexpected Way

- ❓ How does God appear to Elijah? When God finally appears, what does God say?
- ❓ Has God ever appeared in an unexpected way to you?
- ❓ What ways can we train ourselves to expect God in the unexpected?

Read 1 Kings 19:14-18 – Elijah’s Renewed Mission

- ❓ What does God tell Elijah to do? How does Elijah respond?
- ❓ One of the things God tells Elijah to do is anoint Elisha to be a prophet to help share the load of Elijah’s ministry, almost like a sidekick to Elijah. Burnout is a huge problem in many churches and among many church leaders and volunteers. How can we share the load so that can continue to serve without getting overwhelmed or burnt out?
- ❓ God called Elijah back in to the ministry from which Elijah just ran away. Have you ever been called to do something you were reluctant to do? How were you able to overcome your reluctance? Were you ultimately successful?

Bible Connections

- ✚ God invites us to be still and know God’s presence (Psalm 46:10).
- ✚ The prophet Isaiah looks for God’s presence in great signs but realizes God is present even without the great signs (Isaiah 64:1-8).
- ✚ God is still speaking to us, even if it is not in the form we expect (Hebrew 1:1-3).

Living the Story: Service

Many countries celebrate Armistice or Veterans Day in early November. Many military members are stationed around the world, far from home. As it gets closer and closer to the holiday season, it can be especially hard for troops who are spending time abroad. Take some time to write a brief letter to someone in the military, saying that you are thinking of them and praying for them. Things you may want to put in the letter are a favorite Bible quote that gets you through tough times, a positive message, or saying thank you for their service. After you have finished the letters, have someone contact a local service branch to find out who the letters go to, or, if you have members of the military in your congregation, send your letters to them. In the United States, charities like A Million Thanks collect letters to send to the military, you might consider sending the letters through a service like that.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Divided Kingdom

A few weeks ago, we learned the story of the prophet Samuel, and his role in anointing the first king of Israel, Saul. We also learned of Samuel anointing David to be Saul’s successor. David’s son, Solomon, then became the third king of Israel.

When Solomon died, his son, Rehoboam (922-915 BCE), became king. The ten northern tribes of Israel refused to accept him as king and instead elected their own king, Jeroboam (922-901 BCE), becoming the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12–13). The southern kingdom was called Judah, and was home to Jerusalem, the palace, and the temple.

The line of kings in Israel (the northern kingdom) began a series of religious reforms that allowed for local temples to be built and for outside gods to be worshiped. This created tension within the kingdom. During the reign of Ahab (869-650 BCE) God sent the prophet Elijah to correct these errors and return Israel to worshipping God.

Closing Prayer

Stand in a circle and hold hands or place hands on the shoulders of those next to you. Begin your prayer with silent reflection. During the silence, pray silently for a special concern or reflect on the lesson today. After a few minutes of silence, pray together the Lord's Prayer.

At Home

- ✝ Spend some time each day this week in silent reflection. Turn off all distractions and sit in silence. Try for at least five minutes at first, see if you can get to fifteen minutes of silent reflection by the end of the week.
- ✝ Take some time this week to go through your closet and find items of clothing that you do not use anymore. Consider donating them to a nonprofit agency, donation center, or shelter.
- ✝ Imagine you were a Hollywood movie producer producing a film on the life of Elijah. How would you build up the action toward the climax? How would you depict the twist in the story—that God appears to Elijah in silence?

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

God calls Elijah in an unexpected way. Elijah's daily needs were met when he was in the wilderness. Pray the Lord's Prayer, with special attention to the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Monday—Read 1 Kings 21:1-29

Elijah once again confronts King Ahab. Is there something in your life for which you need to repent? Pray to God for forgiveness, trusting in God's unfailing love.

Tuesday—Read 2 Kings 2:1-12

Elijah ascends to heaven, leaving behind an amazed Elisha. How would you feel if you were Elisha and witnessed Elijah's ascension? Reflect on your answer.

Wednesday—Read 2 Kings 2:13-25

With Elijah gone, Elisha has big shoes to fill. Think of how all the times God works through water in the Bible—Elisha purifying water in this story, baptism, Noah's ark, and so many more. Reflect on these things whenever you encounter water throughout the day—when you wash your hands, when you shower, when you do dishes, etc.

Thursday—Read 2 Kings 4:1-44

Elisha performs several amazing miracles. Several of Elisha's miracles involve food—how can you help feed people in need? Consider donating food items to a local food pantry or food drive.

Friday—Read 2 Kings 14:23-29

In spite of a king's evil deeds, God continues to rescue Israel. Pray for your country's leadership, that they may govern with good conscience and meet the needs of their people.

Saturday—Read 2 Kings 15:1-7

Azariah becomes king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Pray for peace in the world. If there are any international conflicts happening, pray for them by name and pray that they are resolved peacefully.