

GOD STEPS IN

Great Gospel Miracles from the Lives of Elijah and Elisha

LESSON 1

1 Kings 20 – God Steps In to Rescue

INTRODUCTION:

After a fierce dogfight, a fighter pilot went down over open water. A furious squall was blowing in, yet the search and rescue team immediately went into action. At great risk to the crew, the helicopter skimmed the towering waves looking for the downed airman. As commander of the ship, you launched the search and rescue team—to rescue a fellow countryman. But if that downed airman was the pilot of an enemy fighter, would you still have ordered the search and rescue team to go out? Why or why not?

CONTEXT:

- What do you remember about King Ahab?
- What do you know about Ahab's wife, Jezebel?
- What can you conclude about Ahab's and Jezebel's spiritual leadership of Israel?
- Where were Israel and Aram (Syria) located?
- What is a prophet?

STUDY GOD'S WORD:

Read 1 Kings 20:1-21

1. Describe the desperate situation in which Ahab and the people of Israel found themselves.
2. Why is it amazing that God would send a prophet at this time to Israel and its king?
3. "There can be no other explanation for the victory except for God's miraculous intervention." Explain.

4. God stepped in to rescue Ahab and the Israelites even though they didn't deserve it. What message did he want them to learn (see verse 13)?

Read 1 Kings 20:22-30

5. Explain the rationale of the Aramean generals as they prepared for a new invasion.
6. What is significant about the new battle site as compared with the previous one?
7. List the reasons why the outcome of this battle is clearly a miracle performed by God.
8. Consider an Israelite observing this battle and an Aramean observing it. What message does each take away?

Read 1 Kings 20:31-43

9. Why did Ahab let Ben-Hadad live?
10. Why did Ahab sin in letting Ben-Hadad live?

LIFE FOCUS:

- *Agree or Disagree:* It should have been easier for Ahab to believe than for us, after all, he had a prophet to tell him about future events.
- At Aphek the Lord won a great victory for Israel. Where is our "Aphek"?
- Humanly speaking, believers face overwhelming odds and persistent attacks on their faith. Prepare a scouting report on the enemies that threaten our spiritual health. Which enemy makes you feel the weakest?
- Read Luke 4:1-12. Why is this section, like 1 Kings 20, a divine "rescue operation" and not just a "how-to fight-temptation" manual for believers?

SUMMARY:

The Lord showed his grace to the Israelites by delivering them from the Arameans. He showed the Arameans that he was no local god but the God of the whole world. God has stepped into our lives through Baptism and sealed us for the victory that Jesus Christ won over all evil forces, both temporal and spiritual. God still speaks through the Word and promises to rescue us from every evil attack.

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LESSON 2

1 Kings 17:1-16 & 2 Kings 4:1-7 – God Steps in to do the Impossible

INTRODUCTION:

In 1976, the average American supermarket stocked 9,000 products; today it stocks 47,000. The produce section alone grew from 65 items to nearly 400. Certainly we see evidence of the Lord's bounty here in America. So, explain this statement: Satan seeks to turn bountiful blessings from God into dangerous temptations.

CONTEXT:

- God has declared war! When Baal worship invaded Israel, God sent his army: the prophets.
- The worship of Baal and Asherah was a vile form of idolatry (see 1 Kings 16:32-33).
- The name Elijah means “the LORD is my God.” The name Elisha means “God is salvation.”
- Zarephath is outside the boundaries of God's chosen people, not far from Sidon!
- Note the phrase “The word of the LORD came,” which will be repeated in this lesson.

STUDY GOD'S WORD:

Read 1 Kings 17:1-16

1. Elijah announced to wicked Ahab that a severe drought would come on the nation. How is this message both a word of judgment from God and also an act of grace by God?
2. God commanded Elijah to go into hiding. What effect do you think this had on Elijah? On Ahab? On Israel?
3. Where did God send Elijah? How did God show his grace to Elijah by sending him there? What insights does Jesus give us into this account (see Luke 4:25-26)?

4. Note the way the widow addresses Elijah in verse 12. Why would her way of speaking have been such a comfort to Elijah?
5. Both Elijah and the widow could have written Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Explain.

Read 2 Kings 4:1-7

6. What made this widow's plea so traumatic?
7. How did the Lord solve the widow's problem? Why was it important to "go inside and shut the door"?
8. How does this account teach us never to ask too little from the Lord?

LIFE FOCUS:

- What do these two unnamed widows teach us about how we are to handle times of financial need?
- *Agree or Disagree:* God miraculously provided for the widows because they believed. If we believe like the widows, God will also take care of us.
- Events in recent years have highlighted a persistent problem in sinful society. From Somalia to Darfur to Syria, displaced people suffer extreme difficulty. Your neighbor sees the suffering on the nightly news and questions the reality of a caring and providing God. "If God is a God of love, why is there so much suffering and struggling?" How do you respond?
- David wrote a psalm verse that fits well with this lesson: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). Solomon wrote in Proverbs, "Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all" (Proverbs 22:2). What promise does God make to believers? What promise does he *not* make?

SUMMARY:

Although it seemed like a hopeless situation, the LORD stepped in to miraculously take care of the needs of Elijah, Elisha, widow, and the woman from Zarephath. For Jesus' sake we know that our loving Father provides for his people in a manner best suited to their physical and spiritual situations. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

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LESSON 3

2 Kings 5:1-19 – God Steps in to Heal

INTRODUCTION:

Your neighbors have a child with leukemia. In the months since they moved into your neighborhood, you have attempted to talk about Jesus with them and have repeatedly invited them to worship with you at church. Recently, their five-year-old child has suffered a major relapse. The parents are bitter and angry at a God who could allow such sickness and suffering to strike their young girl. What do you say to them?

CONTEXT:

- Like Elijah before him, Elisha was sent by God to call the Northern Kingdom of Israel to repentance. Despite the vast amount of idolatry there, the Bible gives tantalizing evidence of true believers in Israel.
- This history recorded in 2 Kings is prophetic history, and not necessarily chronological.
- “Leprosy” was a word used to describe various types of skin infections and diseases. Naaman was infected with some serious type of skin disease, but it wasn’t physically debilitating.
- A “talent” was a unit of weight measurement, roughly equal to 75 pounds.
- The king referred to in this section is probably Joram (i.e. Jehoram), a son of Ahab (see 2 Kings 3:1).

STUDY GOD’S WORD:

Read 2 Kings 5:1-7

1. Luke 2:1 records a census that God used in his plan of salvation. In what way is this event mentioned in 2 Kings 5:2 similar?
2. Read 1 Peter 3:15. How did the servant girl follow Peter’s advice?

3. Can you find the common pagan assumptions in v. 5 & 6? Do they still exist today?
4. Why was the king of Israel afraid? Why was his reaction so shameful?

Read 2 Kings 5:8-12

5. Why might some Israelites view Elisha's offer in verse 8 as patriotic? As treasonous?
6. Imagine what was going on in Naaman's mind when he heard Elisha's instructions.
7. What was the root reason for Naaman's anger and rage?

Read 2 Kings 5:13-19

8. How did Naaman's servants come to the rescue?
9. Why did Elisha—on oath—refuse a gift?
10. Naaman wanted to take Israelite soil along with him. In what way was this a bold witness to his faith?
11. What concerned Naaman about his duties back home? Why did Elisha advise him to go in peace?

LIFE FOCUS:

- *Agree or Disagree:* Children are often the most powerful witnesses for the Lord.
- "If you have your health, you have everything." How is that popular saying a blatant lie? How can it be understood as a comforting truth?
- *Agree or Disagree:* God will heal me of my health issues if I just learn to do what he says.
- How can you carry "Israelite soil" with you wherever you go?

SUMMARY:

The Lord God used an unlikely messenger to bring news of hope to an unlikely prospect. A gracious and loving Lord prepared Naaman's heart for healing, not just of his body but of his soul as well. The Lord led Naaman to witness about the truth of the Savior-God in his homeland. Jesus is our Great Physician, and by his blood we are healed. His free forgiveness brings peace to our souls and power to our lips.

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LESSON 4

1 Kings 19:1-18 – God Steps in to Speak

INTRODUCTION:

What would most people understand if they heard this phrase: “Listen to your still, small voice”? Do you think this is good advice?

CONTEXT:

- In this chapter, Elijah took a trip of close to 300 miles. Note the conditions of travel, the route taken, and the supplies packed.
- To understand Elijah’s mood during this trip, we must remember the awesome miracles God achieved in the previous chapter: the “pray-off” on Mount Carmel, the resulting executions, and the refreshing rain.
- Hebrews 11:37-38 says: “They [Old Testament believers] went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and *in caves* and holes in the ground.” A vivid example unfolds before us.
- The phrase “your altars” shows how the people in the Northern Kingdom worshiped when they were prevented from sacrificing at the temple in Jerusalem.
- We have a hint of the doctrine of election in this section. The number 7,000 might be an exact figure or perhaps a round number.

STUDY GOD’S WORD:

Read 1 Kings 19:1-8

1. Based on verses 1 and 2, characterize the spiritual condition of Ahab and Jezebel.
2. Jezebel threatened to murder Elijah, but she sent him an advance warning. Why?

3. What evidence is there that Elijah was running because he was afraid? What indicates that he may not have been afraid?
4. List the miracles in this section. What lessons was God teaching Elijah during the 40 days of travel in the wilderness?

Read 1 Kings 19:9-18

5. If God knows everything, why did he ask Elijah a question?
6. Identify several spoken or unspoken complaints in Elijah's response (verse 10).
7. Contrast Elijah's claim in verse 10 with the reality described in 18:3-4.
8. God first sent a wind, fire, and earthquake, but he was not in them. What was God telling Elijah?
9. What is the gentle whisper? What lesson is the Lord teaching the prophet with the "still small voice"?
10. Describe God's assignment for Elijah in verses 15-18. What truth did this assignment teach Elijah and all believers?

LIFE FOCUS:

- *Agree or Disagree:* It is wrong for a Christian to pray for his or her death.
- Relate the following passages to Elijah's life and to your own life:
 - a. Romans 11:2-5
 - b. 2 Timothy 2:19
 - c. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9
- What do these verses teach you about God's Word and work in your life?

SUMMARY:

The Lord appeared and spoke to his fleeing prophet. The Lord God reminded his prophet that only the gentle whisper of the Lord touches and changes human hearts. The gospel is still the powerful whisper of a loving God. Only the gospel can bring a heart to faith.

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LESSON 5

1 Kings 19:19-21 & 2 Kings 2:1-18 – God Steps in to Call

INTRODUCTION:

The voters' assembly looked over the list of names provided by the district president. It was a call meeting, the first one in decades. Pastor Smith had faithfully served for years, but he was suddenly called to heaven after a massive heart attack. The prospect of a vacancy was somewhat unnerving to a generation of Christians who had never been without a shepherd. One man stood up and asked the district president some questions that many others silently shared. "Isn't there any way to get more information on these men? All we have is age, family size, where they went to school and where they served. Can't we watch a DVD of a sermon or even interview them personally?" How would you answer?

CONTEXT:

- Remember that Elijah had been given a threefold commission from God (1 Kings 19:15-18).
- The "company of the prophets" (2 Kings 2:5) in Hebrew is literally "the sons of the prophets."
- Once again we have a hint of divine revelation. Somehow, in some way, both Elisha and the students knew that on that particular day, God was going to intervene to take Elijah to heaven.
- Note the root meanings of the names Elijah and Elisha. Elijah means "the Lord is my God." Elisha means "God is Salvation."

STUDY GOD'S WORD:

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21

1. Initially, Elijah did not speak a word to Elisha. What prompted Elisha to run after the prophet and talk about taking leave of his family?
2. Explain this statement: The meal Elisha prepared for the people demonstrated both total commitment and tremendous sacrifice.

3. Use 2 Kings 3:11 to help explain an attendant's duty. What do you think was the main reason God wanted Elisha to spend time with Elijah?
4. How is Elisha's call to be a prophet similar to David's call to be king over Israel?

Read 2 Kings 2:1-18

5. Three times the prophet Elijah told Elisha not to follow him but to stay where he was. Why do you think Elijah kept doing this?
6. What exactly did Elisha ask for in verse 9? Explain Elijah's reply in verse 10.
7. What are some similarities between Elisha and Enoch (see Genesis 5:23-24 & Jude 14-16)?
8. How was Elijah's mantle like Moses' staff?
9. Explain: Watching the Jordan River part was a visual history lesson for the seminarians on the other riverbank.
10. Compare verses 15 & 17. What contradiction do you see in the action of the company of the prophets?

LIFE FOCUS:

- *Agree or Disagree:* If a man desires to become a pastor, it is necessary for him to "burn the plow" and "barbecue the oxen" before he begins his training for ministry.
- Which statement is better?
 - a. "The man does not seek the call. The call seeks the man."
 - b. "I like this area. The Lord has called me to be a pastor, so I'll start a church here."
- *Agree or Disagree:* The doctrine of the divine call brings comfort, confidence, and challenges.

SUMMARY:

Elisha recognized the Lord's call to public service and willingly followed Elijah. In seeing the Lord call Elijah to heaven, Elisha was strengthened in his call to serve as God's representative to the Lord's people. Although every believer is called by the Lord to serve with a life of thankful love, God sets apart and calls some to serve in the public ministry.

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LESSON 6

2 Kings 6:8-23 – God Steps in to Protect

INTRODUCTION:

A dear friend is hospitalized in critical condition after a horrible accident. The doctors have allowed only five minutes for visitors. You receive permission from the family to see her and to pray with her. She opens her eyes and recognizes you. Although you have been friends for years, you are not prepared for what she says: “Don’t bother praying for me. God won’t hear. I’ve prayed all my life, yet look what happened to me. God didn’t deliver me. So save your prayers. I don’t believe they work. I’m beginning to wonder if God even exists.” What can you say in those five minutes?

CONTEXT:

- The kings in this section are probably Joram of Israel and Ben-Hadad II of Aram (see 2 Kings 3:1-3).
- There was an ongoing state of hostility between Aram and Israel (see 1 Kings 20:1-12).
- Dothan was about 10-12 miles north of Samaria, situated halfway between the royal palaces at Samaria and Jezreel.
- This section relates the final miracles that God allowed Elisha to perform during his ministry. Remember that the writer of 1 & 2 Kings didn’t necessarily arrange the material chronologically, but thematically.

STUDY GOD’S WORD:

Read 2 Kings 6:8-12

1. The king of Israel had an amazingly accurate intelligence system. Read Psalm 139:1-8. Who was behind this spiritual “CIA”?
2. List the attributes God demonstrates in these verses.

3. Can you remember other Bible stories where God granted people “insider information”?
4. How is God’s grace shown in these verses?
5. What truth do we find expressed in both verse 12 and in Exodus 14:4?

Read 2 Kings 6:13-23

6. How do verses 13 and 14 reveal the perilous condition of Israel’s national security and the drastic need the nation had for divine protection?
7. The apostle Paul wrote, “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Why did Elisha’s servant need to learn this lesson?
8. The horses and chariots of fire were God’s heavenly hosts—angels sent to serve God’s people. What else does the Bible teach us about angels?
9. Contrast verses 21 and 22 with 1 Kings 20:35-43. Why are the enemies treated differently?
10. How did the great feast teach God’s grace to the soldiers? To Joram? To Ben-Hadad? To everyone?

LIFE FOCUS:

- God is everywhere and he knows all things. Explain how these two truths are both a warning and a comfort to believers.
- Give examples from your daily life when God’s constant protection guarded you from unseen and unknown dangers.
- *Agree or Disagree:* Since God protects us daily, even without our knowledge, praying is not really important.
- *Agree or Disagree:* God always protects his people from disasters.

SUMMARY:

The Lord graciously protected Joram from ambush and attack by miraculously giving him advanced warning. Seeing the army of angels and witnessing Elisha’s miracle, Elisha’s servant saw God’s power to protect. Believers recognize God’s good and gracious hand of protection and rejoice in the Lord’s love. They know that God sends angels to protect them.

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LESSON 7

1 Kings 18:1-46 – God Steps in to Discipline

INTRODUCTION:

“What did we do wrong?” the parents ask. Their child is now in his mid-teens and has begun a series of dangerous activities. For long, sleepless nights the parents have struggled and prayed. They wonder how to reach him. They worry about driving him away. They fear that doing nothing will only enable his sinful lifestyle. How can the parents help their son? How can they discipline him?

CONTEXT:

- This story takes place during the drought announced by Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1.
- Baal was the pagan storm god, often pictured with a thunderbolt in his outstretched hand. Asherah was Baal’s consort.
- Early in this chapter, we meet a man named Obadiah, a remarkable believer who acts boldly in faith.
- Mt. Carmel is almost straight west from the Sea of Galilee, jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea.

STUDY GOD’S WORD:

Read 1 Kings 18:1-15

1. Why is Elijah’s action in verse 2 a bold act of faith?
2. List three facts that demonstrate the intense persecution of believers under Ahab’s regime.
3. Explain: Obadiah is a man of strength and weakness.
4. How was the Lord disciplining the Israelites through the drought and suffering in their lives?

Read 1 Kings 18:16-24

5. What evidence is there that Ahab's attitude had not changed despite the three years of discipline?
6. Why did Ahab obey Elijah's command?
7. What does the people's silence in verse 21 say about the people of Israel?
8. Where is the Lord's hand of loving discipline in this section?
9. Explain verse 22 in light of verse 4.

Read 1 Kings 18:25-46

10. List a few of the typical heathen notions about prayer as exhibited by the prophets of Baal.
11. Agree or Disagree: It was rude for Elijah to mock the religious beliefs of others.
12. Why did Elijah pour water on the sacrifice and the altar?
13. Contrast Elijah's prayer with those of the prophets of Baal.
14. Why did God command Elijah to kill the prophets of Baal (see Deuteronomy 13:5-9 & 17:2-5)?

LIFE FOCUS:

- Discipline hurts! Why does a child say that? Why does a parent say that?
- Give examples of how believers sometimes "waver between two opinions."
- Elijah was accused of being a "troubler of Israel." Explain why confessing and committed Christians will still earn the same epithet today (see Romans 16:17).

SUMMARY:

The Lord used a drought to discipline his people, yet he clearly demonstrated the power of his Word. God was patiently trying to teach the people the folly of unbelief. The Lord's loving discipline displayed law and gospel, judgment and deliverance. The same loving and patient Lord continues to act on behalf of his people. God disciplines us to call us back from spiritual wavering. Rely on his gospel whisper, and take advantage of the privilege and power of prayer.