

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
MARCH 23 2024

who's counting?

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 18:20–22; 19:14–18; Revelation 18:2, 4, 5.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 14.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Elijah's life often seems like a roller-coaster ride through supernatural victory to human despair. As a prophet acting as the mouthpiece for heaven, Elijah had moments of unmistakable fame and power mixed with seasons of loneliness and uncertainty. This week's lesson is about how Elijah negotiated through the emotional ups and downs and came to understand the value of remaining loyal to God's cause and faithful to His Word. Through Elijah's faithfulness it appeared to him that he was alone in his allegiance to God. This theme is repeated throughout the story and continues to recur in the lives of young people today. Taking a stand for Christ is often a challenge to live so differently from their peers that they distinctly stand out. But as difficult as it is to make that choice, it is equally daunting to remain confident in their relationship with God when they feel isolated and alone. Elijah's story portrays how God attends to us during times of depression and ultimately finds a way to speak hope and clarity into our lives.

There are many angles from which this lesson can be helpful to youth. One approach is to invite the students to describe the ways that they identify with Elijah's journey, as well as ways they do not. Many have yet to experience a moment such as Mount Carmel but have experienced the insight that came to Elijah in the cave. Another track that might be helpful is to discuss the way God always has people who are allied with His kingdom and live as lights to a dark world. Another approach to this lesson is to focus on the way Elijah's story warns us about counting or trying to determine who is faithful to God by outward appearances. Given that we see so little of what is really happening in the hearts of people, we might be surprised at how many people are faithful to God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover how to negotiate through despair and uncertainty by faithfulness to God's will. *(Know)*
- Embrace the truth that even though they might feel lonely at times, those who are faithful are not alone. *(Feel)*
- Decide to listen for God's voice in His Word when they feel alone or discouraged. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Remnant and Its Mission, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 13

"The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work

of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Have each student give a defense, from the Bible if possible, for the position they chose on each of the issues.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Some people have a difficult time understanding how it could be that the majority could be misled. Surely, when you put more heads together the outcome should be greater clarity. Right?

An interesting thing happened several years ago at a college sporting event. During the NCAA Cross Country Championship Race the runners came across a dilemma. At one point they had to make a choice about which direction to run. They came to a stage in the race where the way was not marked well and they had to choose to continue down one street or take another way. Both directions looked reasonable.

The crowded pack of runners followed those who were running out in front. The front-runners made their choice and everyone followed them, all except Mike Delcavo and a handful of others. Mike knew the other runners had taken the wrong road and urged the rest to follow him. Many of them laughed and scorned, but a few followed him. Mike finished the race with the four others. Out of 128 runners 123 of them took the wrong way (from Daniel Schaeffer, *Defining Moments,* [Discovery House Publishers, 2007]).

What life lessons do you see in this story?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

It is true that at times in our lives loneliness will feel like emptiness and standing firm and faithful to God will seem inconceivable, even absurd. But as Mike Delcavo and his running mates discovered, the majority is not always right and what most people think is not always the most informed opinion. Elijah's life as a servant of God is marked by moments of tension between amazing acts of faith and seasons of distress and even despair. Take a look at a moment in his journey and see if you can relate!

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Read the story and note what insights are new to you.
- As you read through the story, what words, phrases, or themes are repeated?
- *Underline* what you think are the pivotal parts of this story.
- What do you think is the message God is trying to convey through this story?
- What emotions do you see displayed in Elijah's experience?
- What does God's care of Elijah in his depression say to you in similar circumstances?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there an action to take?
- Is there a decision to make?
- What are similarities between Elijah's experience and our lives today?
- Some have suggested that the people who hear God's voice often appear peculiar to the world they live in. What are some other biblical characters who were clearly listening to a different voice from the one the world was listening to? (Examples: Noah, Moses, Esther, David—taking on a giant, Daniel and his three friends, etc.)

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Matthew 7:13, 14; Jeremiah 23:3; Daniel 1; 3; and 6.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

When we read this story it is difficult to recapture the intensity and the danger that surrounded Elijah. He was a wanted man, and the courage and faith so brilliantly displayed on Mount Carmel stands in stark contrast to the cowardly response to Jezebel's threat. Clearly, prophets—mighty though they may be—are human. Consider a few touch points that might benefit your study:

What does Israel's "no answer" to Elijah's appeal mean? (1 Kings 18:21)

The word "halt" or "waver" actually means "to limp" or "hobble" as though you had a broken leg. One leg of their faith was healthy (they worshiped the God Jehovah), but the other leg was broken (they also worshiped Baal). This is what led to the showdown at Mount Carmel—it is one or the other—not both! God is clear: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3, NIV). Is it possible that one of the reasons we feel like our walk with God limps is because we are trying to be loyal to more than just Him?

Why did Elijah feel alone? (1 Kings 18:22; 19:10, 14)

After a do-or-die, stand-or-fall, appeal to Israel to choose God or Baal, their answer is: no answer, which in fact is an answer of sorts. What other moments in the Bible can you think of in which one or a few might have felt alone in their faithfulness to God? We often think Elijah's mantra, "I am the only one," is a petulant whine. But leadership is often a lonely experience, initially. When a volunteer is needed, it is common for people to look around the room and see if anyone is responding. You might ask the class if they have ever had to stand up first and alone. Did others follow?

How is it possible that people who experience

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Metaphors

If I were to say, "Be careful about working with Bob! He is a snake," what images of Bob would you see? What qualities of a snake immediately come to mind? Sneaky. Subtle. Dangerous. Deceptive. Some might say "slimy," but snakes are actually dry and scaly. Nevertheless, how powerful are metaphors to capture an idea? A metaphor is the use of a word or phrase to describe somebody or something that is not meant literally, but makes a vivid, pictorial, or experiential comparison. Try it with this week's lesson: "If you had to describe Elijah's experience with a type of weather, a car, or plant/tree of any sort, which would capture Elijah's story? Why?"

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

such sensational events of God's power (fire from heaven—fed by birds) can slip so quickly into doubt and depression?

Contrast the silence of Baal on Mount Carmel with the silence of God in the cave. It is because God spoke so mightily that Elijah did not expect events to turn the way they did. This is what confused Elijah. So what do we do when God's voice is not so profound? It is notable that God's voice, though not explosive, is audible and real, unlike the silence of Baal on Mount Carmel. Or perhaps another question to ask is: "What do we do when God speaks unmistakably on one day and seems nonexistent the next?"

Finally, draw the students' attention to this week's *Flashlight* quote: "Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. . . .

Then let no man attempt to number Israel today, but let everyone have a heart of flesh, a heart of tender sympathy, a heart that, like the heart of Christ, reaches out for the salvation of a lost world" (*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 188, 189).

How does this quote affect our approach to the people we see that may or may not seem faithful to God?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have students, in groups of two or three, look up John 10:14–16 and Matthew 7:13, 14 and read them out loud. Ask them to discuss and prepare to report their response to the following questions: Do these two verses contradict each other? How would you reconcile the two ideas Jesus shares here with His disciples?

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14–16, NIV).

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14, NIV).

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

It is difficult to imagine Elijah's journey mirroring ours. It is possible that we may never experience Mount Carmel or the feeling of being completely alone. But if there is anything to take from Elijah's roller-coaster ride of life it is that God calls us to listen for His voice, in the fire and in the silence. Also, as we seek and serve God we can be certain that we are not the only one, no matter what we face. Somewhere around the world, maybe even as close as the person sitting next to us or as far away as the young people sitting on the opposite side of the globe, someone is struggling with God in a similar way. Sometimes it seems unbearable to be the first person to stand up for what is right, volunteer to help, or be counted among God's people. But we need Elijahs today who will be the first to take a stand. It may seem lonely at first, but the promise is sure that soon it will be clear that we are not alone, and furthermore, that we are not crazy for choosing to be on God's side.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 14.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 18:20–22; 19:14–18; Revelation 18:2, 4, 5.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 14.

who's counting?



Photo by Alden Ho

keytext

"[Elijah] replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant. . . . I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

"The LORD said to him,' . . . I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.' "

(1 Kings 19:14, 15, 18, NIV)

flashlight

"Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. . . .

"Then let no man attempt to number Israel today, but let everyone have a heart of flesh, a heart of tender sympathy, a heart that, like the heart of Christ, reaches out for the salvation of a lost world" (*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 188, 189).

what do you think?

Either/Or

Think through the following questions and prepare to defend the side you take.

1. Since it is so difficult to know a person's heart, do you believe a majority of people will be saved, or a minority of people will be saved?
2. Do you think we will be surprised by who is saved (since man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart), or will we not be surprised by who is saved because our lifestyle tends to convey our deepest values (by their fruit you will know them)?
3. Do you think it is easier to be faithful (obedient) to God in adversity or is it easier to be faithful to God when positive things are happening?

did you know?

In an informal survey given to college students, 8 out of 10 young adults reported that they grew closer to God in trials and adversity as opposed to seasons of ease and prosperity. If a similar survey were given to church members and your friends, do you think the numbers would be similar? Why or why not?



INTO THE STORY

"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.'

"But the people said nothing.

"Then Elijah said to them, 'I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.' "

"He went into a cave and spent the night.

"And the word of the LORD came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

"He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

"The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'

"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

"Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

"He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

"The LORD said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.' "

(1 Kings 18:21, 22; 19:9–18, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story and note what insights are new to you.

As you read through the story, what words, phrases, or themes are repeated?

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What do you think is the message God is trying to convey through this story?

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What emotions do you see displayed in Elijah's experience?

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Is there a promise to claim?

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Is there a lesson to learn?

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Is there an action to take?

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Is there a decision to make?

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What are similarities between Elijah's experience and our lives today?

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Some have suggested that the people who hear God's voice often appear peculiar to the world they live in. Who are some other biblical characters who were clearly listening to a different voice from the one the world was listening to? (Examples: Noah, Moses, Esther, David—taking on a giant, Daniel and his three friends, etc.)

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punch lines

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" **(John 10:14–16, NIV).**

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" **(Matthew 7:13, 14, NIV).**

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" **(1 Peter 1:8, NIV).**

"Help, LORD, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race" **(Psalm 12:1, NIV).**

"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" **(Revelation 14:12, NRSV).**

further insight

"Patience under trials will keep us from saying and doing those things which will injure our own souls and injure those with whom we associate. Let your trials be what they will, nothing can seriously injure you if you exercise patience, if you are calm and unexcited when in trying positions."

—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 70

Sabbath

Read Matthew 7:13.

The *What Do You Think?* exercise invites you to take a side and explain your response. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13, NIV). Do you think today's reading is difficult to explain or easy to explain? Why?

List a few examples of what the easy road looks like in your everyday life as well as what the narrow way looks like.

Easy Road: _____

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Narrow Road: _____

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Sunday

Read Revelation 14:12.

Read the *Into the Story* verses about Elijah's struggle and answer the questions listed in the *Out of the Story* section. How would you explain Elijah's state of mind? What are some other stories in Scripture that portray similar themes as the one in this week's lesson?

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In what area of your life might you look "peculiar" to those around you if you were to obey God fully?

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Monday

Read 1 Kings 19:14, 15, 18.

The *Key Text* for this week combines Elijah's despair and God's encouragement. As you read today's passage, think of someone you know who feels alone because of their faith in God. Take time today to pray for them and perhaps write a note or convey the message to them that they are not alone. What are some other Bible passages that you can use in your note of encouragement? Use a concordance and look up the word "alone" to begin your search for those additional verses.

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Why do you think God spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper rather than through a powerful earthquake? What does this tell us about how we seek to hear God in our own life?

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Tuesday

Read Psalm 12:1.

As you read the *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, notice the simple reminder that when you think very few are even paying attention to God, many have given their undying allegiance to Him around the world. How might this encouragement inspire you and your church to renewed faithfulness?

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The next time you hear numbers of people baptized or added to the church, remember the many who are not counted or even known.

Wednesday

Read through the *Punch Lines* carefully and *underline* or *highlight* the key phrases in each verse. How do these verses relate to the story of Elijah's struggle?

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As a young person in the church, which passage is the most helpful to you? If you were to choose one passage to apply to your life this week, which one would you choose? Why?

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Thursday

Read Matthew 10:32.

In what area of your life do you need to make a decisive stand for God? Write out your commitment below:

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Friday

Read 1 Peter 1:7, 8.

Take time this week to listen for God to speak to you. It may be that He speaks in thunderous ways, but more likely you will hear His voice in the silence. Journal below what you have "heard" Him impress on your heart this week.

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this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 14.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.