



WINTER 06

JANUARY 11, 2026

LESSON TEXT

I Kings 18:19–24,
36–40

FOCUS VERSE

I Kings 18:21
And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God gifts us with people to call us back to covenant.

The Prophet Elijah

I WILL
HONOR GOD
AS I HONOR
THE PEOPLE HE
PLACES IN MY LIFE.

COVENANT CONTEXT

During the dark days of the Divided Kingdom, the prophet Elijah lived as a Jehovah worshiper, even when the numbers seemed overwhelmingly stacked against him. His faithfulness to covenant often put him at odds with Israel's wicked kings but also inspired the Gospel writers to compare John the Baptist to him. This portion of covenant history shows that God was and is always calling us back to Him.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: What has been the most memorable or life-changing day of your life so far (besides the day of your new birth)?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to one of the prophet Elijah's most life-changing days.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE REIGN OF AHAB

A. An Era of False Worship

DISCUSS: *What does success look like to you? How can you ensure you are worshiping Jesus and pursuing Him?*

B. An Era of False Prophecy

DISCUSS: *What sort of false spiritual speak are people believing today? Why do so many find these ideas attractive and convincing?*

C. I will inwardly resist the spirit of worldly compromise.

II. THE RISE OF ELIJAH

A. Elijah Stopped the Rain

B. Elijah Called Down Fire and Brought Rain

C. I will let my life display the power of God. **V**

DISCUSS: *What do you think it would take to see a national revival in our world today like Elijah saw?*

III. THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

A. John the Baptist Confronted False Religion

DISCUSS: *What makes it so hard to lovingly tell someone a hard truth? How do we correctly speak the truth in love?*

B. Jesus Confronted False Religion in His Day

C. I will outwardly stand for truth in the face of compromise.

DISCUSS: *Why is it important for us to have spiritual leaders who, like Elijah, are not afraid to challenge and confront us with our shortcomings?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us learn to receive correction with a humble spirit and respond with true repentance
- For God then to give us the ability to share the truth we have received with boldness and heartfelt love

LESSON CONNECTION

May 6, 1954—not many people today recognize the significance of that date, now over seventy years ago. However, it is a landmark date in the sport of track and field because on that day, British runner Roger Bannister became the first runner to finish a full mile run in less than 4 minutes (3 minutes and 59.4 seconds). For almost seventy years, runners across the world had been ardently pursuing that goal but to no avail. By the 1950s, most runners and coaches were convinced the four-minute mile was a human impossibility. The closest anyone had ever come was 4 minutes and 1.04 seconds.

Bannister's achievement is even more startling because he appeared to be the least-likely candidate to achieve such a grand goal. Bannister was decidedly a rebel, with little use for coaches and traditional training techniques and regimens. By all accounts, he was considered a lazy athlete. At one point, his training regimen consisted of only three half-hour sessions each week. Furthermore, the experts all agreed for the four-minute mile to be even *remotely* possible, the weather would have to be a perfect 68 degrees with no wind; the track must be hard, dry clay; and perhaps most importantly, there must be a large, enthusiastic crowd whose energy would spur the runner on.

However, on May 6, 1954, the day dawned cold and rainy, the track was wet and muddy, and the crowd was small and unenthusiastic. Against all odds, one man accomplished what an entire generation of experts was convinced was impossible. As they say, all records are made to be broken, and that day, it was Roger Bannister's turn. His story should teach us not to underestimate the power of one person's achievement. One race forever altered the perceived field of possibility for all runners and simultaneously set up a new barrier to break: the three-minute mile.

In today's lesson we will study an Old Testament figure who also defied the expectations and outlook of his own day. (He was also a pretty good runner, by the way [I Kings 18:45–46].) As we will see, the Israel of the prophet Elijah's day was far gone in idolatry and corruption, thanks to the evil King Ahab and his pagan wife, Jezebel. The idea of spiritual revival and renewal was a laughable absurdity; Israel's moral decay seemed unstoppable. But it only took one man—one prophet with a divine calling—to single-handedly tear down the stronghold of false worship that powerful King Ahab had raised up.

Today in our own era of spiritual decline and decay, God is still looking for individual, faithful men and women who will stand up in their homes, neighborhoods, communities, states, and nations to stem the tide of overwhelming evil that Satan is unleashing. And God will use each one who will commit to the cause of the Kingdom to spark a mighty renewal that will sweep our land.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE REIGN OF AHAB

An apparent disconnect exists between the biblical account of Ahab's reign and the picture we see from the archaeological and historical record. Ahab and several other wicked kings are known as the Omride dynasty (I Kings 16:23–24; 22:39). Although they were kings, their reigns are overshadowed by stories of the prophet Elijah and his protégé, Elisha. However, archaeological evidence indicates that Israel under Ahab had “impressive cities that functioned as administrative centers” as well as a “standing army” and functional “international trade” (B. E. Kelle & B. Strawn, *The Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible*). In fact, Omri and Ahab are the first two Israelite kings to be named in non-biblical sources, indicating Israel was a significant leader in Ahab's day, something the writer of Kings chose to ignore. Why?

A. An Era of False Worship

Although the world would have lauded Ahab as successful, his reign as king over God's covenant people was failed because he introduced and spread the worship of the false god Baal. Under Ahab, the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom grew bolder and more brazen. Although Jeroboam's idolatrous golden calves were meant to worship Jehovah, the God of Israel, Ahab's idolatry was outright worship of a false god. He made no pretense; Ahab was not in covenant with Jehovah, the one true God.

DISCUSS: *What does success look like to you? How can you ensure you are worshiping Jesus and pursuing Him?*

Baal was not just *any* false god, he was the chief god of the Canaanites, the very people God had commanded Israel to drive out completely and never to imitate (Numbers 33:50–56). Under Ahab and Jezebel's evil influence, the worship of Baal—not Jehovah—became the official “state religion” of the Northern Kingdom. For the writer of Kings, no amount of economic success or international influence could offset this disastrous decline in covenant faithfulness. Remember, Ahab was not just leading people; he was leading God's covenant people.

B. An Era of False Prophecy

To no one's surprise, the rise of false worship was accompanied by the simultaneous rise of false prophecy. Gone were the days of the bold prophet Nathan who confronted David with his sin in II Samuel 12:7. In Ahab's day, roughly four hundred false prophets of Baal “prophesied” through elaborate signs and flowery speeches to tell the wicked king only what he wanted to hear, falsely claiming to speak with God's approval (I Kings 22:6, 11–12). These ancient frauds were likely paid well, coddled in the royal lap of luxury to ensure they remained aligned with Ahab's interests. Though he was surrounded with “spiritual” advice, Ahab had insulated himself from any real word from God. And then came Elijah.

DISCUSS: What sort of false spiritual speak are people believing today? Why do so many find these ideas attractive and convincing?

C. I will inwardly resist the spirit of worldly compromise.

As we survey the leaders and influencers in our world today, the attitude of Ahab is alive and well. Gurus and success coaches surround the wealthy and powerful—and even common folk—offering what they consider sage advice. Some even cloak their advice in spiritual speak and tell us how much God wants to bless and prosper us, but many offer no direction on how to get right with Him; they are often more concerned with wealth and fame. The road of true holiness remains untrod by many who even name the name of Christ. Like Nathan and Elijah and other faithful people of God, we must resist the urge to bow to the false doctrines of our day.

II. THE RISE OF ELIJAH

A. Elijah Stopped the Rain

Into this melee of pagan practices stepped the mighty Elijah the Tishbite. Unlike King Ahab, Elijah had no given pedigree; we do not know his father's name, nor are we sure of the exact location of his hometown of Tishbe. However, none of those details matter because the one crucial fact about Elijah stems from his name: it means "My God is Jehovah." Surrounded by a world saturated with symbols of Baal worship, Elijah stood out because he worshiped the only one worthy of worship.

Elijah's introduction into the story feels abrupt and confusing, but perhaps that was the writer's point. Elijah was meant to "appear out of nowhere," an emissary sent from the throne of God. His very first words were: "As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (I Kings 17:1). That sounds strange. What does the threat of an extended drought have to do with overthrowing false worship? In the Canaanite family of gods, Baal was the storm god, the one responsible for sending rain so their crops would grow. But Elijah, the worshiper of Jehovah, was challenging Baal's "superpower" on his home turf (the ancient land of the Canaanites). When the heavens were drought dry for three years, Elijah proved that Baal was powerless and only Jehovah sends rain. Further, Baal had no control over the land, proving Jehovah and His covenant people rightfully possessed the Promised Land He had promised them.

B. Elijah Called Down Fire and Brought Rain

Through a series of miracles beautifully told in the rest of I Kings 17, God provided for His prophet during the drought. In their agrarian culture, a three-year drought all but guaranteed there would be no available food. The story of the widow of Zarephath reinforces the dangers of the drought-induced famine, which for the poor and needy especially meant certain death (I Kings 17:12).

In this crisis moment, Elijah once again almost magically appeared to confront the wicked Ahab and conclude this contest between Jehovah and Baal, a once-and-for-all war of worship. Elijah's proposed test was simple: Build an altar of sacrifice, and

whichever God or god answered by fire would be the one Israel should worship. Elijah seemed to tilt the odds in Baal's favor. As the god of storms, all Baal had to do was send one tiny lightning bolt to strike the already tinder-dry wood and a fire would surely ignite. And Elijah let the prophets go first.

The story is dramatically (even comically) dragged out. The false prophets of Baal cried to Baal from morning until noon, but Baal did not answer. Amused, Elijah began mocking them and their god. Maybe Baal was not answering because he was distracted, traveling, sleeping, or even in some translations, "using the facilities." The false prophets doubled down and cut themselves until their blood ran like water, but the heavens were still silent. No response. No thunder. No lightning. No flame.

It was Elijah's turn. Using twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel, he first repaired the old altar of the Lord that years of neglect and idol worship had broken down. Then Elijah ordered his servants to pour twelve barrels of water on the sacrifice. Water is pricey in a drought; it must have hurt the hearts of those who watched him soak a sacrifice when they could have used the water for cooking, cleaning, or even drinking. His audience probably mocked Elijah.

"You can't set a soaked sacrifice on fire."

Elijah likely smiled back. "You're right. I can't. But my God can."

In the short time it takes to read it, Elijah prayed a one-sentence prayer, and suddenly God sent a flame of fire from heaven so great it consumed the sacrifice and lapped up the water in the trench around it. Jehovah—the one, true, living God of Israel—had defeated Baal, and God's covenant people repented. By the end of the chapter, the long-withheld rain was pouring down on thirsty land.

C. I will let my life display the power of God.

In a world filled with false spiritual voices that will affirm anything a person might choose to believe, God often wants to establish the truth of our message through miraculous signs and wonders like the miracle of Mount Carmel. Jesus Himself affirmed this truth when He told His disciples that miraculous signs would follow those who believe, and these signs would confirm the preached Word (Mark 16:16–20). God not only wants you to proclaim His Word, but He also wants to work miracles in your life that will confirm it. Will you open yourself up to the miraculous power of God today? V

DISCUSS: *What do you think it would take to see a national revival in our world today like Elijah saw?*

III. THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

A. John the Baptist Confronted False Religion

Sadly the great revival sparked on Mount Carmel was temporary. Israel quickly returned to her idolatry, and Ahab's capital of Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. When we fast-forward eight hundred years past Elijah, God's people had physically

returned to the Promised Land, but their hearts remained dangerously disloyal to God. Spiritually speaking, the Judea near the end of the “Intertestamental period” was not much better off than Israel in Ahab’s day. The nation lay crushed under the heel of Roman oppression with no real hope. Worse yet, the false prophets’ lies had been replaced by the false teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees.

Into this spiritual mess, God sent one final prophetic messenger, the herald of the coming Messiah, John the Baptist. Little is known about him other than the message he preached, which was an uncompromising demand for repentance in preparation for Jesus’ coming. To the corrupted Jewish leaders, he thundered: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: . . . I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: . . . whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor” (Matthew 3:7–8, 11–12).

John the Baptist did not court favor, nor did he mince words; ultimately, he lost his life for courageously calling out Herod Antipas for his sin of adultery. But Jesus spoke highly of John and his fiery ministry: “All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come” (Matthew 11:13–14).

DISCUSS: *What makes it so hard to lovingly tell someone a hard truth? How do we correctly speak the truth in love?*

B. Jesus Confronted False Religion in His Day

Although Herod eliminated John, Jesus picked up right where John left off. Jesus’ message was also repentance. He preached: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Like John before Him, Jesus faithfully and vigorously confronted the Jewish leaders of His day, calling everyone to repentance so they could all be right with God.

C. I will outwardly stand for truth in the face of compromise.

It isn’t enough to simply “inwardly disagree” with unrighteousness and spiritual hypocrisy invading our culture. At some point, we must boldly take a stand for truth like Elijah, John, and Jesus stood. Yes, we risk being outcasts and even persecuted (a growing risk every day), but our mission is not to blend in and conform; our mission is to stand out and proclaim. In the parallel stories of Elijah and Elisha and John the Baptist and Jesus, we see a glimpse of a revival if we have the courage to reach out and believe God for it.

DISCUSS: *Why is it important for us to have spiritual leaders who, like Elijah, are not afraid to challenge and confront us with our shortcomings?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how records are often broken quicker when people believe it is possible. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Roger Bannister's story is even more remarkable when we see what happened after he broke the seemingly unbreakable four-minute mile. Just forty-six days later, Australian John Landy ran a mile in 3 minutes and 58 seconds, breaking Bannister's record. Within a year, three additional runners broke the four-minute mile in the same race. Since that time, over one thousand runners have run a mile in less than four minutes.

The funny thing about the things we call impossible is that once someone does it, it seems like everyone does it. Some even call this phenomenon the "Bannister effect." In a way, we see it illustrated in the paired stories of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was the first prophet to perform miraculous signs (seven of them), including one never-before-seen miracle of resurrection of the dead. (In the Old Testament, with its limited view of the afterlife, this miracle was especially astounding.) However, Elijah's protégé, Elisha, not only performed double the number of Elijah's miracles (fourteen), but he also performed two miracles of resurrection, the last occurring after he himself was dead (II Kings 13:20-21).

In their book *The Power of Impossible Thinking*, Yoram Wind and Colin Crook spend some time analyzing Bannister's impact on long-distance running. Pondering how his feat was possible,

they write: "Was there a sudden growth spurt . . . ? Was there a genetic engineering experiment that created a new race of super runners? No. What changed was the mental model. . . . When that limit was broken, the others saw that they could do something they had previously thought impossible" (hbr.org).

Humans have had the ability to run a four-minute mile (even before Roger Bannister); what we lacked was the belief that it was possible. When the "impossible" happens, it is no longer impossible. Perhaps that may be why in local congregations, we see miraculous events—physical healings, backsliders returning—forming clusters. Sister Jones testifies that God healed her terminal cancer, and it inspires Brother Smith to say, "If God can do that for Sister Jones, then He can surely take care of my glaucoma." Suddenly one miracle becomes a half dozen.

In Elijah's day, it only took one man to stand up for righteousness and refuse to compromise, and a mighty revival was sparked. Since God could do that in Elijah's day, imagine what would happen in our own day if each of us would take the challenge to stand for righteousness on our job, in our school district, or in our city, state, or province. Perhaps our long-prayed-for revival is waiting on us to stand up and speak up.