



A man just like us

ELIJAH

by Liam Goligher

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The good book guide to Elijah

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introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, mums and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. ☞ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with his concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study Elijah?

Elijah stands out in the Bible as one of God's all-time greats. He's right up there alongside Moses, as one of the duo who appeared alongside Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Elijah blasted into the national life of Israel like a tornado, sweeping through the land until eventually he was caught up into heaven in a whirlwind.

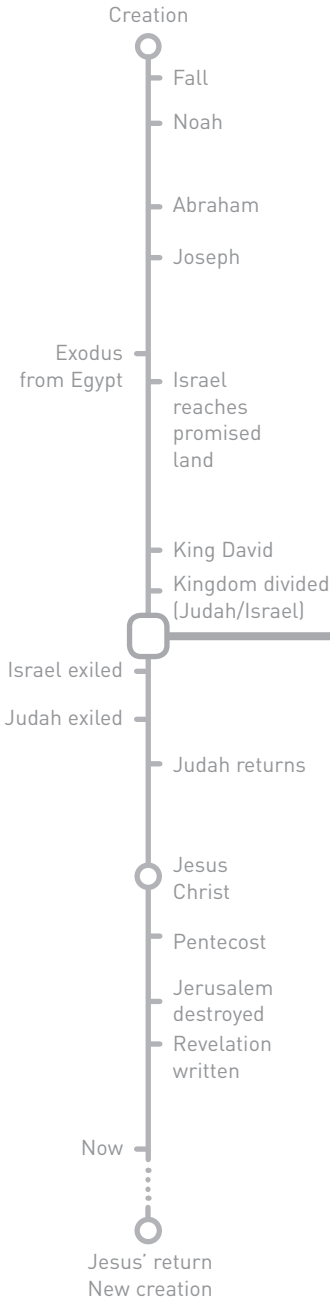
Elijah served the one true God at an epic time in the history of Israel. In the ninth century BC, God's Old Testament people—the nation of Israel—were deeply mired in idolatry and apostasy. God worked through Elijah and his heir, Elisha, in a succession of miracles not seen since the days of Moses and not to be seen again until the time of Jesus.

Israel could never forget Elijah, so great was the impact. They kept saying: *He'll be back!* And Jesus himself pointed to John the Baptist as the returned Elijah, whose arrival in Israel signalled the imminent appearance of the long-awaited Messiah.

Yet the New Testament writer James describes Elijah as *a man just like us*. Elijah wasn't infallible or perfect. His life displays the kind of humanity for which you and I are noted—marked by weakness, failure, frustration and anxiety. It was through this one man—someone just like us—that God magnificently confronted and exposed the false religion Israel had been seduced by, and the murderous corruption that went with it.

In our day, too, most people imagine that God is irrelevant to their lives, and look to other "gods" for what they need. These pressures affect Christians as well. We are often few in number and feel insignificant. Like Elijah, we may even suspect that God has abandoned us.

But through God's grace Elijah persevered. Ultimately his life and ministry revealed God's sovereignty, grace, provision, resurrection power, inescapable justice and his awesome salvation. How much could we learn from Elijah for ourselves, in our situations today? The true story of Elijah gives us a great opportunity to discover how God can take people just like us to use for his eternal glory.



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does Elijah's ministry fit into the whole story of God's word?

ELIJAH'S MINISTRY
875-848BC

1

1 Kings 16 v 29 – 17 v 24

BOOT CAMP

talkabout

1. In what ways do people today think that our modern world has made progress, compared with previous generations?

- What do people who think like this often believe about “the idea of God”?

investigate

Elijah appears in the Old Testament about 900 years before Christ. Ancient Israel has been divided into two kingdoms, and King Ahab is ruler of the larger northern kingdom.

▶ Read 1 Kings 16 v 29 – 17 v 1

2. During his reign, Ahab fortified a number of his cities, formed profitable trade agreements with surrounding nations, and had some success in military campaigns. What aspect of Ahab’s reign is highlighted in chapter 16?

DICTIONARY

Judah (16 v 29): the southern kingdom after Israel was divided (see timeline, p6).

Samaria (v 29): the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam (v 31): first king of the northern kingdom, who was remembered as evil.

Sidonians (v 31): people from the pagan city of Sidon, in Phoenicia, north of Israel.

Baal, Asherah (v 32, 33): false gods.

- Why only this, do you think?

The false god Baal was associated with weather and fertility. Baal-worshippers believed that if they appeased him, typically through cult prostitution, he would send good weather and their crops would flourish.

3. Elijah brings Ahab a message from the "LORD" (God's name as revealed in his covenant with Israel). As he speaks, what do we learn about...
 - Elijah's convictions about God?

- Elijah's understanding about himself?

Note: Literally, Elijah says: "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand..."

4. Imagine what it would be like to stand in front of Ahab and announce this unwelcome news from the God that he so openly provoked and disobeyed. How could Elijah be so bold?

- **Read Deuteronomy 11 v 16-17.** By what authority could Elijah speak to Ahab like this?



- When Elijah promises the Baal-worshipping King Ahab that there will be no rain, what spiritual contest does he announce?

“The word of the LORD came to X”: this is how the Old Testament usually introduces a new prophet. But not Elijah: so some think that at this point Elijah was not yet called to be a prophet. However, he surely acts like one.

5. **Read James 5 v 17.** What insight does this give us into Elijah’s faith and passion?

 **apply**

6. What is needed for Christians today to be more like Elijah? Think about:
- what he confidently knew about God.

- how he viewed himself.

- what he prayed for (James 5 v 17).





getting personal

Elijah spoke into an age like ours. Just as Israel practised idolatry, people today turn to all sorts of spiritual beliefs and lifestyles that seem “broad-minded”. By contrast, Elijah had one overriding conviction: the invisible Lord lives, and we cannot avoid or escape him. Is that your conviction?

How has your confidence in the presence of the living God sometimes been undermined by the “modern” ideas of our age?

How will you resist the influence of these wrong ideas?



investigate

▶ Read 1 Kings 17 v 2-24

DICTIONARY

Jordan (v 5): the main river in Israel.

7. Look at verse 3. What is surprising about God’s instruction to Elijah?

8. What do you think Elijah learns about God in the Kerith Ravine?

- What would he learn when the brook dried up?

Significantly, God sends Elijah next to the region of Sidon, the homeland of Jezebel, who is known for her devotion to Baal and promoting Baal idolatry in Israel (see 1 Kings 16 v 31 and 18 v 19).



9. What has been the effect in Sidon of God's word spoken by Elijah in Israel?

10. What does God reveal about himself in Sidon, by providing food for Elijah, the widow and her son?

- What does God reveal about himself by raising the widow's son to life again?

11. How does the living God compare with Baal?



explore more

optional

Jesus referred to this story when he was teaching in Nazareth.

▶ **Read Luke 4 v 16-30**

What are the similarities between Israel in Elijah's day and Nazareth in Jesus' day?

What response from God to Israel's rebellion in the time of Elijah does Jesus highlight here?

In Luke 4, what is Jesus saying about himself and the gospel that would be preached in his name?

Read Acts 13 v 44-48 to see one instance of how this came true.



apply

12. Think about the experience of Elijah, when God took him out of the limelight and sent him far away into the wilds. What can we learn through such experiences about...
- God's priority for our lives?
 - God's provision?
 - God's purposes—in what he does and doesn't give us?

getting personal

Sometimes in life the brook Kerith dries up. Our health suddenly deteriorates, our job comes to an end, our relationships break down, or our fruitful ministry disappears.

When things in your life suddenly go pear-shaped, what can you expect God still to be doing?

How will that change your perspective on life in that moment (perhaps that's now)?

pray

Praise and thank the LORD... who lives, who speaks to this world, who acts with sovereign power, who provides for our needs, and who shows grace to the undeserving.

Confess times... when you have feared other people more than the LORD.

Ask God... to help you fear, hear, obey, serve and trust him, as Elijah did.

