

INTRODUCTION

The title of our resource book for this curriculum—*Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah & Elisha*¹—captures well the focus of our study for the next thirteen weeks. The northern kingdom of Israel had descended into a period of apostasy (abandonment of the faith), beginning with the division of the nation in 930 B.C. At that time, King Jeroboam introduced the worship of the golden calf, apparently representing Yahweh (the LORD), in violation of the second of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:4-6; 1 Kings 12:26-30). Fifty-six years later (874 B.C.), when King Ahab assumed the throne, he took an even more wicked step. At the incitement of his pagan wife, Jezebel, he introduced the worship of another god, Baal, in violation of the first commandment (Ex. 20:3; 1 Kings 16:29-33). What was the LORD's response? He raised up two men of faith who were prophets, Elijah and Elisha, to call the northern kingdom back to the true God. Their story begins with the reign of Ahab in 874 B.C. (1 Kings 16:29-33) and extends to the death of Elisha sometime after 798 B.C. (2 Kings 13:14-21).

We too live in an age of apostasy. Our nation and many of the churches in our nation have turned away from the one true and living God and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Let's pray that these lessons in *The Gospel According to Elijah and Elisha* will prove timely in calling the members of our own church, both young and old, back from the brink of apostasy.

The book of Kings (1 and 2 Kings) tells the story of how Israel violated the covenant God made with them through Moses at Sinai and, as a result, ultimately went into exile from the Promised Land. The author gives a disproportionate amount of space to the successive ministries of Elijah and Elisha. "The largest part of 15 out of the 47 chapters in the book (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9) covers the lives of these two prophets. Almost a third of the history is given to the roughly 80-year period during which they lived, even though the book itself covers over 400 years."² The Holy Spirit thought it was important to focus on the exciting ministry of these two men of faith, as they called the *northern* kingdom back to the true God. (Note: There is only one mention of Elijah's ministry to the *southern* kingdom of *Judah*. In 2 Chronicles 21, reference is made to a letter Elijah wrote to King Jehoram of Judah, who reigned 848-841 B.C.)

These chapters in Kings contain some of the most exciting events in the Old Testament (great for you teachers!). There is a concentration of miracle stories in the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Just as the LORD empowered Moses to perform great signs when he established his covenant with Israel initially, so when God sought to call his people back to the covenant, he empowered Elijah and Elisha to perform miracles also. These miracles demonstrated that they were messengers of the LORD, the true God, and that the word which they spoke was true (1 Kings 17:24).

¹ By Raymond B. Dillard, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999.

² Dillard, p. 7.

While Elisha is mentioned only once by name in the New Testament (Luke 4:27), Elijah is mentioned about thirty times. He figures prominently as a foreshadowing of John the Baptist, and he even appears with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). *Faith in the Face of Apostasy* makes a point of showing the link between the stories of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament and the message of the gospel in the New Testament. It would be good for you teachers to make your lessons Christ-centered also.

As usual, teachers will be supplied with a weekly Teacher's Forecast, which will provide background and lesson helps each week. The questions on the daily Bible reading schedule are also a resource for you to use. In addition, we hope to point the teachers of younger children to other resources that are age appropriate for your classes. All teachers are urged to read the appropriate sections in *Faith in the Face of Apostasy* each week. You will notice that each section concludes with some discussion questions, many of which are application questions, especially suitable for teen and adult classes.

ELIJAH (1)

1 Kings 16:29–17:24; James 5:16b-18; Luke 4:24-30; Hebrews 11:32-35a

Memory Verse: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective* (James 5:16b NIV).

Background Helps:

In addition to the material above in the introduction, read the Foreword and Preface (pp. ix-xvi) and chapters I and II of *Faith in the Face of Apostasy* (pp. 1-33) this week. (This first reading assignment is rather lengthy, but the readings that follow will be much shorter.) Especially notice what Dillard says about God's covenant with Israel: the worship of Baal broke the covenant and resulted in the penalties of covenant-breaking, particularly drought and famine (see Deut. 28:23-24; Lev. 26:3-5, 18-20; Dillard, pp. 17, 19-20). Also, notice what he says about the identity of Baal as a god of weather and fertility, which sheds light on why the LORD brought the specific judgment of drought and famine on the land because of the nation's idolatry.

Lesson Helps:

Possible aim: My students will learn how God provided for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in the midst of the judgment of drought and famine, so that they will trust in the LORD alone to provide for them.

Hook: How will you capture your class's attention in a way that is lesson-related?

Book: Cover the story of Elijah found in 1 Kings 16:29–17:24 including: (1) the introduction of Baal worship by King Ahab; (2) God's announcement of the judgment of a drought through the prophet Elijah; (3) God's provision for Elijah through ravens at the brook Cherith; (4) God's provision for Elijah and the widow of Zarephath and her son through the miraculous multiplication of flour and oil; (5) the raising of the widow's son from the dead and her confession of the LORD as the true God. You may also want to include key New Testament references: (1) Elijah expressed his faith in God's provision through prayer (James 5:16b-18, including our memory verse); (2) God's provision included a *Gentile* widow (Luke 4:25-26); and

(3) the widow also exercised faith in God's provision, when her son was raised from the dead (Heb. 11:35a).

Look: (1) What false gods we are trusting in to meet our needs? Education? Material wealth? A job? An inheritance? Parents or another relative? The government? (2) How can we demonstrate our faith in the LORD, the one true God, to supply our needs?

Took: What specific need are you facing right now? How will you express your faith in God to provide for that need this week?

Storytelling will once again be a key method for teaching these lesson on Elijah and Elisha.

Storytelling³

Storytelling is one of the most effective teaching methods, for children and adults alike. It is true: Everybody loves a story. But good storytelling is an art that follows some time-tested principles. How can you tell a good story? Here are some suggestions:

- Use picturesque, vivid, descriptive, dramatic language.
- Use dialogue between the characters.
- Leave out extraneous details (but sometimes details that seem extraneous at the beginning of a story turn out to be important later on). Be as concise as possible.
- Make sure the story is clearly and logically presented in a manner appropriate to the age level of your audience.
- Arouse interest at the beginning of the story.
- Use questions from time to time to hold the attention of your audience.
- Use visual aids, if appropriate.
- Make sure your story has a point and conveys that point to the audience.
- *Above all, do not merely report the story, but relive the story by dramatic use of both voice and body.* (To achieve this effect, the teacher must know the story thoroughly and enter into the plot through the use of imagination.)
- Use the basic narrative plan as portrayed in the following diagram:

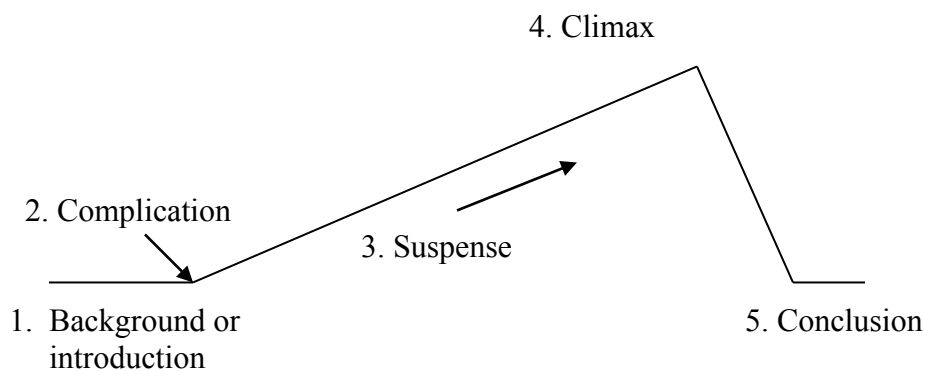



Fig. 1

³ Jay Adams, *Pulpit Speech* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 21-40.

There are five elements to the basic narrative plan: (1) the background or introductory material; (2) the introduction of some complication or problem; (3) suspense which builds through new complications, failures to solve the original problem, or new insights into the problem; (4) a climax or solution to the problem or problems; and (5) if necessary, a brief conclusion. The teacher is advised to read through the story of Esther in the Bible to see an example of masterful use of this narrative plan and a truly great story.

Home Assignment:

 Read 1 Kings 18; James 5:16b-18.

 Memorize 1 Kings 18:39b ESV.