



Elijah



MEETING AIM

To understand that God is the only true God, and more powerful than anything.



BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Kings 18



BACKGROUND

Of all the early kings of Israel, Ahab was one of the worst. The Bible records that he and his wife, Jezebel, did many terrible things. Worst of all, Ahab led the people of Israel away from God and served Baal instead – a false god worshipped by his foreign wife and her own people. Ahab built a temple and an altar to Baal, and set up a sacred site for the goddess Asherah. The prophet Elijah pops into Ahab's story very suddenly; we don't know anything about him other than that he comes from Tishbe, he turns up, sent by God to announce a drought which won't end until he, Elijah, says so. Elijah then goes into hiding as drought grips the land and King Ahab orders a man hunt for the trouble-making prophet.

+ CIRCLE TIME



As the children arrive, sit everyone down in a circle. Ask the children if they have done anything this week that they would like to tell the group about. Share something that you have done this week, too.

+ IMPOSSIBLE FIRE



You will need: a disposable aluminium tray (quiche trays are ideal); small items for starting a fire such as sticks, dry grass, cotton wool balls and torn-up newspaper; things that won't burn easily (eg a spoon, a glass bottle, a sea shell); a cup full of water; a box of matches (to stay in leader's possession at all times)

Ask children whether they have ever helped to build a bonfire or light an open fire. Ask them to help you build a small bonfire ready to light (you won't actually light it!). Invite them to choose from the materials you have provided and build the fire, prompting them with questions: what does a fire need? What will burn easily? What will take a bit longer to burn? What won't burn at all? When you have built your bonfire together, pour the water all over it and try to light it. Impossible! Tell children to watch out for an impossible fire like this in today's story.

+ BIBLE STORY



You will need: a disposable aluminium tin (turkey roasters are ideal); small items for starting a fire such as sticks, dry grass, cotton wool balls and torn-up newspaper; some pebbles or small stones; a picture of a bull, cut into a few pieces; a jug of water and cups for everyone

Ask the children if they've ever felt really thirsty. What did it feel like? What did they want to drink? Invite them to imagine living in a dry, dusty desert land and being thirsty for years. Give them each a cup of water but tell them not to drink it; imagine that this is the precious water that must last them all week!

This is where our story starts; we're in hot, dry Israel on a mountain called Mount Carmel. We've climbed all the way to the top, but we can only drink a tiny sip of water – remember, it's got to last us all

week! (*Encourage everyone to have a tiny sip of water.*)

We're here with wicked King Ahab. He and his even more wicked wife, Queen Jezebel, have stopped worshipping God and persuaded all of you – the people of Israel – to worship their false god, Baal, instead. All the prophets of Baal and their friends are here too – there are 850 of them! They all look very grand and important.

There's someone here who doesn't look grand or important at all, in fact, he looks rather old and scruffy. His name is Elijah, and he's a prophet sent by God to show King Ahab who's boss. Through Elijah, God brought the drought, and it's been going on for three whole years!

Elijah says to all the thirsty people of Israel: "So, are you going to worship God, or Baal?"

Elijah says to the prophets of Baal: "My God is the only true God! I challenge you all to prove me wrong!"

Invite the children to help you build an altar out of stones, then build a bonfire on top of it as they did in the introductory activity. Explain that this is an altar for animal sacrifice, and add the cut-up picture of a bull on top of the fire.

Elijah shouts to the prophets of Baal: "This is my challenge! We will each pray for our god to light a fire. Whoever does so is the only true God!"

The 850 prophets of Baal reckon this is going to be easy. They do everything they can think of. First, they pray loudly all morning. Then they dance around the altar. Nothing happens. Elijah starts to tease them: "Shout louder! Dance harder! Maybe your god's asleep, or maybe he's gone out!" The prophets get desperate, and get wilder in their praying and dancing. No answer, not one tiny spark in the bonfire.

Now it's evening, and we're all tired and thirsty. Maybe you can have one more tiny sip of water – just one, remember, it's got to last you all week! (*Encourage everyone to have a tiny sip.*)

"Now," cries Elijah. "My turn!" He builds his altar and adds firewood. (*Add a few more sticks to your bonfire.*) Then he dedicates it all to God. Then he does something which makes you all think he's mad, he asks some of you to pour your precious water on the bonfire! (*Ask a third of the children to tip their cups of water onto the fire.*)

What do you think Elijah's doing? (*Invite responses.*) But Elijah hasn't finished. (*Ask another third of the children to tip their cups of water onto the fire.*) And he's still not



done! (*Ask the remaining children to tip their cups of water onto the fire.*) What is God going to do with this soggy mess? (*Invite responses.*)

Here's what Elijah does next. He prays: "O God of Israel, show everyone here that you are God and I am your servant! Light this fire and remind your people that you are the only true God!" Suddenly... WOOOOOMPF! God sets the whole thing on fire! (*Encourage children to wave their arms like flames as you talk.*)

The flames are roaring higher! Look! They're licking up all the water, burning up all the wood and gobbling up every piece of the bull on top of the bonfire! When the people of Israel see this, they fall down on their knees. (*Encourage children to do this.*) They shout: "THE LORD IS GOD!" (*Encourage children to shout this.*)

God and Elijah have won! The people chase the prophets of Baal down the mountain and kill them with their own swords. The king is crosser than ever, and Elijah's own life is in danger, but at last, it begins to rain. The drought is over, the people love God again and there is enough water for everyone! (*Refill everyone's cups and invite them to drink up.*)

+ CHATTING TOGETHER



Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- I wonder if there was any part of the story you didn't like?
- Which part of the story can you imagine clearly?
- How did you feel when God started the fire?
- I wonder what this story tells us about God?
- If you could ask God about this story, what question would you ask?

+ CREATIVE RESPONSE



You will need: sheets of A4 paper; scissors; coloured pencils, especially red, orange and yellow; a large bowl of water.

Encourage children to cut out or tear realistic flame shapes and colour them dramatically, talking about the colours of flames they have noticed in the past, eg in a birthday candle or in a bonfire that's been burning all evening. As you make

the flames, invite children to talk about some amazing, seemingly impossible things God has done, and encourage them to write or draw these on the flames (eg made seahorses and the Northern Lights; turned water into wine; brought Jesus back from the dead). Also invite children to ask or write questions about things that God hasn't done (eg why hasn't God stopped all war? Why didn't he make Grandpa better?).

Fold the flames into thirds (bottom edge and top tip towards the middle) then drop them, folded tightly, into the water. Watch as they slowly, magically, unfold by themselves, until they look like flames burning on the surface of the water. As you watch, chat about some of the things they have written, allowing the children to select which ones.

+ PRAYER



You will need: floating candles; matches; large bowl of water

Give each child an unlit candle and invite them to hold it as they pray in silence to God, for whom nothing is impossible. They could thank God for something wonderful he has done, ask him a question about something he hasn't done yet or ask for his help with something difficult. When each child is ready, encourage them to hand their prayer candle to a leader who lights it and floats it on the water. Once all the candles are lit, say: "Amen" together and blow out the candles.

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