

Study Guide
Series: Lessons From the Wilderness
“Whispers in the Wilderness”

Monday - 1 Kings 17:1-16, 18:1-2, 7-8, 16-19

When Ahab became king of Israel, he married Jezebel, a Baal-worshipping queen from Sidon. Their reign brought Israel economic riches, but spiritual poverty as they actively suppressed the worship of Israel’s God. The prophet Elijah boldly challenged the idolatrous king, saying God would send an extended drought. In the difficult drought conditions, God miraculously provided for his faithful prophet. There’s a lot of trust in this story. Elijah trustingly followed God’s direction even when it must have been scary. The widow trusted Elijah and shared her bread. Ahab’s servant trusted Elijah to keep his word. What people have been trustworthy in ways important to you? In what ways have those people affected your ability to trust God? Ahab greeted Elijah with, “Is that you, the one who troubles Israel?” Ruling as a tyrant, and seeking to kill anyone who was faithful to Israel’s God, the king still blamed his kingdom’s problems on the one man who dared to speak God’s word to him. Have you ever been reluctant to hear God’s word when it conflicted with your own agenda? When have you, in a large or small way, had the chance to “speak truth to power”? How did you do, and what were the results—externally, and in your own heart?

Tuesday - 1 Kings 18:20-46

Elijah confronted King Ahab, and called Israel to account for worshipping the false god Baal. He set up a showdown with the prophets of Baal where the true God could prove himself. Elijah challenged the Israelites: “How long will you hobble back and forth between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow God. If Baal is God, follow Baal”. Like the earlier Israelite leader, Joshua (Joshua 24:14-15), he also called Israel to choose who they would serve. Each of us faces the same question, and neutrality is not an option. Who do you choose to serve today? How are you living out that choice in meaningful, tangible ways? Led by Ahab and Jezebel, most of Israel worshiped the Canaanite god Baal. The temptation to worship false gods is still with us. Today there’s a vast array of “modern Baals”—material possessions, financial security, reputation, career achievement, even “right” theology. Prayerfully ask if you are putting any “modern Baals” ahead of God. Join Elijah in his prayer: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant” (verse 36).

Wednesday - 1 Kings 19:1-14

God gave Elijah a great public victory. But Queen Jezebel was still in power. Angry about Baal’s defeat, she threatened to kill Elijah. Tired, depressed and afraid, he ran. God cared gently for Elijah’s physical and mental fatigue. Then God spoke again to Elijah in his wilderness—perhaps in the way Elijah least expected. Canaanite images often showed Baal with fists full of thunderbolts. God sent fire on Mt. Carmel, but not here. The *New Bible Commentary* says, “‘A gentle whisper’ and ‘a still small voice’ (RSV) do not do full justice to the enigmatic Hebrew, which may be better rendered ‘a brief sound of silence.’... it implies God was at last passing in the silence after the storm.” When have you heard God, not in sound and spectacle, but in silence? Elijah didn’t just wander aimlessly in the wilderness. He went to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai—the very place where God had made a covenant with the people of Israel in the days of Moses (Deuteronomy 5:2). What are some of the sacred places, the fixed points in

your life's journey with God? Do you ever consider returning to them in times of difficulty or pain?

Thursday - 1 Kings 19:15-21

Elijah's depressed feelings (like ours) did not give him an accurate picture. God said Elijah's complaint that "I'm the only one left" was not true—there were thousands of other faithful Israelites. And God had much for Elijah to be thankful for—a renewed mission, and Elisha, a faithful helper and designated successor. Moses once found himself overwhelmed, trying to lead the Israelites all alone. Through Moses' father-in-law, God sent him the direction, "Get some help" (Exodus 18:13-24). God gave Elijah help, too—a man named Elisha to help him, and eventually succeed him. Have you ever tried to carry "the weight of the world" on your shoulders alone? How can you recognize people God may have sent to lighten your load? Jezebel's bullying threats scared Elijah—but not God. He sent Elijah to anoint Jehu king of Israel. Jehu got mixed reviews from the Biblical historians, at best, but he did end Jezebel's reign of terror (2 Kings 9:30-37). Have you, like Elijah, ever felt as though you can do no more for God? What helps you to remember that, like Elijah, "the God of new beginnings" always has a purpose beyond yourself that you can serve?

Friday - 2 Kings 2:1-15

The Bible only told of God taking one other person directly from earth without having to go through death. (Enoch in Genesis 5:24.) God honored Elijah's long, faithful service by making his passage from this life unique and amazing. Elisha watched, cried "Oh, my father, my father!" tore his clothes (a sign of mourning), and then picked up Elijah's coat and his prophetic mission to Israel. Hebrews 2:15 said Jesus came, in part, to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," used Elijah's story to comfort and strengthen American slaves. Does Elijah's "chariot ride" to heaven seem long ago and unrelated to your life, or does it give you one more hopeful sign that there is life beyond this life, that you need not fear death? As you imagine Elijah being caught up in that fiery "chariot" and taken directly to meet the God he had been serving, what would you do first when you enter God's presence? What would you most want to ask or tell God?