

Elisha turns back the soldiers

2 KINGS 6:8-23

prepare



PRAYER

God, may I be wise and merciful in difficult situations. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To glimpse the results of feeding an enemy army

STORY SUMMARY

Israel's neighbors were raiding their land. Elisha tipped off the king of Israel about Aram's plans to capture the Israelites. The angry king of Aram sent his troops to capture Elisha, who asked God to blind the soldiers. Elisha led the blind men to the king of Israel. Instead of killing them, Elisha ordered a feast and enemies ate together. After that the Arameans no longer came raiding in the land of Israel.

teaching tips for primary

The context and events of today's story may seem quite removed from the lives of children today (an enemy army, sudden blindness, a great feast). But like other stories this quarter, today's story explores peaceful strategies that children may be able to use in their everyday experience. Help children expand the concept of "enemy" by thinking about people whom they do not like, who annoy or frustrate them, or who are not their friends.

Decide which Explore activities you will do, and check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

This story is set in a part of the Bible that confuses many readers. The children of Israel have divided into two separate kingdoms, Judah and Israel, and the Bible text jumps from one to the other in disorienting ways. The names of some of the kings are found in two different forms, and sometimes two different kings have the same name.

The stories of Elisha are set in Israel, the northern of the two Israelite kingdoms. The capital city was Samaria. The nation just to the northeast of Israel was Aram. In older Bible translations, Aram was often called Syria, a translation that goes back to the Greek and Latin. To avoid any misidentification with the modern nation of Syria, however, it is best to refer to it as Aram, as it is written in the Hebrew.

Aram and Israel conducted annual raids on each other's territories. This practice was widespread and was not limited to the ancient Middle East. Here, the delightful story is told without the names of either the king of Israel or the king of Aram. In this way it is transposed from being a story about a particular historical event to one that has broad application.

Elisha the prophet

Elisha first appears in the Bible as a disciple of the more famous Elijah. In one of the earliest of his stories, he is harassed by a large group of boys on account of his baldness. This is not an auspicious beginning.

Elisha emerges as a prophet for the little man. For the most part, his prophetic actions are small deeds done for poor folk in need. A village needs a cleaner water supply. A widow is about to lose her children in payment for defaulting on a debt. The caterer for a band of prophets is woefully short of food. A poor man loses a borrowed ax head.¹

Elisha played a reluctant role in the war with Moab (chapter 3), but he is remembered more as a peacemaker. He healed the commander of the army of Aram (chapter 5). In the present story he gets into trouble because time and again he thwarts the intention of Aram to raid Israel.



Reversal of sight

A key concept in this story is sight. The Arameans "see" that they have horses, chariots, and a great army. They "see" that their opponent is only one little bald-headed prophet. Seeing this, they have great confidence. The servant of Elisha "sees" the same sight and is terrified until Elisha says to him, "Fear not."

"Fear not" is a command most frequently given in Scripture and it is often accompanied by "Have faith!" Loss of faith is not unbelief as much as it is fear.

Elisha then prays for the pattern of sight to be reversed. The servant now "sees" that there is a reality beyond mathematics and military reasoning. The

Arameans now "see" that they are reduced to helplessness despite their military might. In their helpless state, Elisha leads the whole Aramean army unwittingly into the Israelite capital city and to the king of Israel.

The king of Israel now "sees" his enemies captive and ready for execution. In yet another stunning reversal of sight, however, Elisha suggests that the king is not looking at captives; rather, he has guests. At this point, the story shifts from hostility to peace. The enemies are fed. To share a meal with someone in the ancient world was to establish a covenant of peace.

For at least one episode in the Old Testament, the world was transformed from fear to faith, from hostility to friendliness, and from killing to kindness. Are the realities of the unseen world enough that the people of God could do it again? "Sight" in this story is a way of looking at the world through the eyes of faith. Whether one sees the world and other people as essentially hostile or as potentially friendly is a basic question of faith in God.

1. 2 Kings 3:19-22; 4:1-7, 42-44; 6:1-7.

gather

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Paper plates
- Markers
- Candle and matches
- White fabric
- Sticky notes

poster pack

- Bible memory poster (Isaiah 65)

to do

- Cover the longer words on the Bible memory poster with sticky notes.

media connections

- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (find a YouTube recording of *Enemy Pie* read by Camryn Manheim)
- "Down by the Riverside" by Playing For Change
- Internet search for "food bank/food pantry" in your area
- *My Friend the Enemy* by Daniel Smith (a recently published WWII children's novel that families may want to read at home)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Welcome children warmly. Ask children to share something fun or surprising that happened to them in the past week or two. Share a story of your own about a surprising act of kindness you experienced recently.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Give a small paper plate to each child. Children can write their names and draw hearts on the plates. As they write, spread a piece of white fabric in front of you and place a candle on it.

Light the candle and invite children to place their heart plates around the candle, and to say:

I come to worship God with all my heart.

Welcome each child by name and offer the words:

Peace be with you.

Sing "Peace Pilgrim's Prayer," track 16 on the Shine CD. Music is found on page 25 of the *Year Two Songbook*.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Remind children that there are many ways to pray. Sometimes moving while we pray can help us express ourselves to God. Encourage children to spread out so they have room for a movement prayer. Guide children in the Morning prayer, found on page 4 of the Primary leaflet. If you meet in the afternoon or evening, adjust the words of the prayer. Explain that the words on the leaflet, however, can be used as a morning prayer throughout the week.

Bible memory

Prepare the Bible memory poster ahead of time. Use sticky notes to cover all the words with more than four letters. Try to say the verse together while the words are covered. Children can take turns uncovering the words.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.
—Isaiah 65:25 abridged

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Show 2 Kings 6 in a Bible. Explain that today's story takes place when Israel had kings. Prophets sometimes gave advice to the kings. Turn to page 110 in *Shine On: A Story Bible* to find today's story.

Spread out a large story cloth. Lay out cards labeling different corners of the mat: "king of Israel," "king of Aram," and "village of Dothan." Place a story figure for Elisha near Dothan and a figure for the king of Israel near his sign. Lay out a string of beads in the "king of Aram" corner to represent the Aramean soldiers.

Read the story from page 110 of *Shine On*.

- During the second paragraph, take Elisha to the king of Israel and then back to Dothan.
- During the fifth paragraph, lay the beads in a circle around Elisha.
- During the sixth paragraph, move Elisha to the king of Israel, followed by the Aramean beads. Surround them with another string of beads to represent the Israelites.
- During the last paragraph, spread out a paper towel and line up the beads on either side of it with the king and Elisha.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Use the wondering questions to help children explore the story from multiple viewpoints.

- I wonder how the Aramean army felt when they opened their eyes in an enemy city.
- I wonder why Elisha chose not to hurt the Aramean soldiers.
- I wonder how you would treat someone who made you feel mad or scared.
- Imagine the Aramean soldiers' surprise when they were given a feast.
- I wonder what our world would be like if we treated enemies as friends.

PEACE NOTES

Look at the Peace poster together. Which peacemaking ideas did Elisha do in today's story? Which of the things on the poster did the Aramean soldiers do?

Play Peace pursuit on the Three-in-one game board (from the poster pack). Follow directions on the back of the poster pack cover.

teaching tip

If you mount the game board on poster board, it will make it sturdier.



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supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Die
- Game tokens (one unique button, bead, or stone per child)

storytelling props

- Story cloth
- Story figures for king of Israel and Elisha
- Small signs for king of Israel, king of Aram, village of Dothan
- Two strings of beads
- Paper towel

poster pack

- Peace poster
- Three-in-one game board
- Peace pursuit game cards
- "Three-in-one game board" instructions

to do

- Prepare to play the Peace pursuit game using the Three-in-one game board. Cut the game cards from the top of the sheet, and cut them apart.
- Become familiar with the rules of the Peace pursuit game. Organize the Peace pursuit cards on the game board.
- Place the Good Samaritan cards in a separate zipped plastic bag for session 11.

explore

CREATE

Make a friendship poster. Draw cloud shapes of various sizes on a large sheet of paper and invite children to gather around to draw pictures and add words describing what friends do together. Have children share about their drawings and ideas as they work.

When the poster is finished, look at the description of the book *Enemy Pie* at the bottom of page 2 in the Primary leaflet. Ask: What is the opposite of a friend? When might a neighbor, a sister, or a brother feel like an enemy? Which of the ideas on our friendship poster could help turn an enemy into a friend? (If you have time, read the book or listen to it being read on YouTube. It takes about ten minutes.)

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- Easel paper or poster board with cloud shapes of various sizes
- Markers
- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (optional)

RETELL

Use the words on pages 1 and 2 of the leaflet to sing today's story to the tune of "Down by the Riverside."

supplies

- Primary leaflets

LEAFLET

Children will do the dot to dot mystery words on page 3 of the Primary leaflet. *Answers:* kindness, surprise, and invite.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- Pencils

other ideas

- Create a simple feast with Bible-times foods: bread, raisins, dates, grapes, pomegranate, and olives.
- Post the signs from Share the story around the room and travel to them in story order.
- Use puppets to create a modern-day story in which someone is surprised by a kind deed.

DISCOVER

Children can work together to solve the Peace today section of the Sudoku puzzles (from poster pack). If you did not do the puzzle in session 7, cut apart the squares along the side of the poster. Children will work to place the pictures so that no row, column, or group of any six squares has the same picture more than once. Stick the pictures on with reusable adhesive putty so they can be removed to play the puzzle again. Sudoku puzzles work best with only two or three children working at a time. Who would like a turn and didn't get to play in session 7? Keep track of who still needs a turn in an upcoming session. The completed puzzle is pictured below.

supplies

- Sudoku puzzles (from poster pack)
- Reusable adhesive putty



bles

PRAY

Play “Óyenos, mi Dios,” track 15 on the Shine CD and invite children to sing or hum along. (Music is on page 24 of the *Year Two Songbook*).

Pray, asking God to hear and respond to the requests you have for yourselves and others. Invite children to speak simple prayers for God’s help if they want.

SEND

Sing this sending song together to the tune of “Frère Jacques.”

**Jesus blesses, Jesus blesses,
gives us peace, gives us peace.
Peace be unto you,
peace be unto you.
Be at peace, be at peace.**

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player



My faith has been formed by children when I recognize that they already have experienced God in a childlike way—and I want more of that.

—Marlene Bogard
Newton, Kansas

leader’s closing prayer

Did today’s session make you aware of any children who are having particular trouble with an “enemy”? Pray particularly for that child and follow up if you have indications that the child is being bullied or in an otherwise serious situation.

God, it is not easy to treat our enemies with compassion. Give me a willing heart to show concern for the enemies of my life. Renew my spirit and strength for the week ahead. Amen.

looking ahead

For next week’s Spiritual practice you will need bubbles, preferably one container per child. Store the Peace pursuit cards for use in session 13. (These were cut off of the Three-in-one game board today.)