

THE GOD CONTEST

LESSON PLAN

5-11
year-olds

Session Summary: The LORD of the Bible does the impossible to prove that he is the one and only true God. We have an important decision to make about worshipping and following him.

Let's pray before we start

LORD, Jesus Christ, please give us confidence that you are the one true God as we see what you have done in history to prove it. Amen.

Let's get started

What do all the following things have in common? (Have examples of the documents to hand if possible. The children may give a number of possible correct answers.)

- A birth certificate
- A passport
- A driving licence

All of those important documents have the person's name on them, and perhaps family members' names, an address and a photo, too. There are lots of things you're not allowed to do if you don't have these documents. And that's because each one proves that you are who you say you are.

But God doesn't have a birth certificate—he's always existed. He doesn't need a passport—by his Spirit he is everywhere. And he certainly doesn't require a driving licence!

So, how does God prove who he is? In today's true stories from the Bible, we will find out how.

As I read this story, every time you hear the word "Yahweh", which is the name God gives himself, you're going to punch the air like you're supporting your favourite sports team. Let's practise... This is a true story about Yahweh [pause]. Yahweh [pause] was the God of Israel.

Let's listen to the story*

(Read *The God Contest* up to and including the words "For hundreds of years, not many people joined Team Yahweh" on the page that looks like this. (You can read the rest of the book later after doing the Bible study on Acts 17.)



* *The God Contest* by Carl Laferton/Catalina Echeverri is available from Christian retailers and at thegoodbook.com (US) / thegoodbook.co.uk (UK).

Let's think

(If you are doing this session with children across the full age range, start by asking questions below to the younger child(ren) before asking the questions for older ones. If you only have older children, the questions for older children can be asked as stand-alone ones.)

Questions for younger children

What important question did Elijah want to help answer for the people of Israel? (Who is the true God: Baal or Yahweh?)

What impossible-sounding challenge did he set? (Possible answer: to call on their god to burn the sacrifice without the prophets setting fire to it.)

Which God showed he was real by doing what looked impossible and sending fire?

What important decision did Elijah tell the people of Israel they had to make? (Answer: if Yahweh is God, follow him!)

Questions for older children

According to Elijah, why was it not possible for the people of Israel to try to keep following Baal AND Yahweh? (Answer: because only one is the true God and worthy of being worshipped and followed.)

What did Elijah do to make it really clear that it was the power of the true God, Yahweh, that set fire to the sacrifice? (He worked alone, doused everything in huge quantities of water, appealed directly to God aloud in front of the people.)

What do you think of Ahab's and Jezebel's reaction? (Possible responses may involve: surprise at their refusal to believe the evidence of their own eyes and/or guesses at their motivations: namely, a desire to save face, or remain in charge, or sheer hardheartedness.)

Let's play a game

... in which you have to prove that what you say about yourself is true.

We have a list of challenges. Two people have to bid against one another about how well they think can do each challenge until someone decides to tell the other, 'PROVE YOURSELF!' If the challenged person does their task as they said they would, they get a point. If not, the challenger gets the point.

Who is the best at naming creatures that live in the sea. How many can you name in 15 seconds?

(Try to outbid one another until someone says "Prove yourself!")

Who is the fastest at star jumps/jumping jacks? How many can you do in 30 seconds?

Who is the strongest? How many proper press-ups can you do in a row?

Who is most accurate? How many of these [throwable items you have to hand] can you throw into this [robust receptacle!] from this distance?

Who has the best balance? How long can you stand on one leg with your eyes shut without wobbling?

(Come up with more if you like.)

In that game we had to back up our claims about our abilities with proof. In our true story about Yahweh at Mount Carmel, Yahweh backed up Elijah's claims about him with proof.

But that is not the end of the story. For hundreds of years, not many people joined Team Yahweh. But then it was time for another God contest. This time, Yahweh did something even more amazing. He didn't send fire. He came as a human—Jesus. And we're going to read more about him now in the Bible.



Let's listen to God

... to find out what God has done to prove to people today who he is. We're going to listen to what the apostle Paul said when he travelled to Athens during his second journey to tell people about Jesus.

(If you are doing this session with children across the age range, encourage your older child(ren) to do their activity independently in a different room while you look at the passage with the younger one(s). Give them their own copy of the NIRV version of Acts 17 v 22-34 on page 6. If you're happy for them to use a device, you could direct them to biblegateway.com)

Let's think again

For younger children:

I'm going to read you some verses from a speech Paul made when he was telling the people of Athens all about the one true God. After each verse I will read two sentences, and you need to tell me which one is true based on what Paul said.

(You could give the children actions/movements to do to indicate if the first or second statement is correct.)

Paul said in verse 24: "God ... made the world. He also made everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth."

- We invent God OR God invented us

Paul said in verse 25: "[God] is not served by human hands. He doesn't need anything. Instead, he himself gives life and breath to all people. He also gives them everything else they have."

- We give God what he needs OR God gives us what we need

Paul said in verse 26: "From one man [God] made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live."

- God is in charge of the world and where people live OR We are in charge of our lives and where we live

Paul said in verse 29: "We are God's children. So we shouldn't think that God is made out of gold or silver or stone. He isn't a statue planned and made by clever people."

- We can make gods to worship OR God made us to worship him

WOW! God made everyone and gives us everything. He is in charge of our lives. He made us to be his children who worship him.

But that's not how people treat God. Instead, all through history people have tried to tell God how to be or made up their own ideas about what God is like. Listen to what Paul said about that in verses 30-31: "[God] commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins. He has set a day when he will judge the world fairly. He has appointed a man to be its judge. God has proved this to everyone by raising that man [Jesus] from the dead."

Have a go at finishing off this sentence to sum up what Paul said: *God proved that he is not just the Creator of everything but also the Judge of everyone by...*



For older children:

The Israelites Elijah spoke to and the Athenians Paul spoke to were all very religious (see v 22). But the problem was that they were not worshipping the real God (see v 23, 29).

What did Paul tell his listeners about what God is like and what God had done in the past (v 24-27)?

How did these truths need to change how the Athenians thought about God (v 29)? How do you think those truths should shape how people think about and respond to God today?

What has God done to prove that he is not only the Creator of everyone but also the Judge of all people (v 31)? Who is Paul referring to?

From what you know about Jesus' life and work and promises, what else does Jesus' resurrection prove about him?

What is the right response to these truths according to verse 30? What different reactions to that message did Paul come across (v 32-34)? How does that remind you of Elijah's experience?

For everyone:

(If you're in two groups, come back together and invite the older child(ren) to share their reflections. You could read the rest of *The God Contest* at this point.)

In Elijah's time, and in Athens in the 1st century AD, and still today, people ask the same questions about who the real God is and how we can know for sure.

What different ideas or beliefs about God have you come across? (Be ready to share if necessary.)

All these different ideas leave us with this important question: who is the real God?

What impossible thing did Jesus do to help us answer that question? (Rose from death.)

So what important decision do we all have to make? (Whether to follow the God of the Bible, whether to repent and believe in Jesus.)

(That might be an appropriate place to end with your children. But if the following are relevant, here are a few further questions...)

What event in history should we talk about with people who want to know who God is? (Christ's resurrection.)

What different reactions to what Paul said about Jesus' resurrection did you notice? (sneering, interest, belief.)

Have you ever experienced any of those as you have spoken to other people about Jesus?

Let's pray together

I'm going to read out some lines to help us pray. Let's think together about how we can fill in the gaps in those lines based on what we've learned today from God's word.

LORD God, we praise you because you are...

We thank you that you proved who you are by...

Lord Jesus, we know that because you rose from the grave...

Please give us confidence...

We pray that you would give us opportunities to talk to other people about...

Now let's use our ideas to pray together.



CRAFT/ACTIVITY IDEAS

Using minimal resources... Make an identity document. Make a passport from a folded piece of paper. Your child(ren) could draw a crest or your national flag on the front and draw a picture of themselves inside with their name, date of birth, address and family contact details inside. You could also make another one together for Jesus. What symbol would they choose for the front to show who Jesus is? What names do they know for him? Does he have a date of birth (more than one answer possible!)? Where does he live now? Who is his family?

Using things you may have around...

- You'll need various ingredients: sweet or savoury edible "fire". For instance, lay halved red grapes on a cracker and top with cheese to look like flames and some sort of twig-shaped snack as kindling; or top a cupcake with flame-coloured icing and chocolate twig-shaped snacks as wood; or make a marshmallow stack as the altar with red and yellow gummy sweets for flames. There are lots of ideas on the internet!
- You'll need an empty tissue box or empty kitchen roll tube, pens, paper, tissue paper: make fire and an altar. Decorate your cardboard receptacle to look like stones stacked as an altar and have torn tissue paper in red and yellow issuing from the top to look like flames.
- You'll need 12 smooth stones (see 1 Kings 18 v 31) and marker pens. Write and decorate a word on each stone of the "altar" from a key verse and its reference from either passage, for example:
 - 1 Kings 18:39 (NIV): The / LORD / he / is / God! / The / LORD / he / is / God! / 1 Kings 18 / verse 39
 - Acts 17:31 (ICB): God / has / proved / this / to / everyone / by / raising / that / man / from / death!

More of a project... If you have a barbecue or a fire pit or scope to build a fire, enjoy constructing and/or lighting that with your children (taking all due safety precautions!) and enjoy a campfire story session where you retell together both stories where God proved who he is—at Mount Carmel and at the resurrection.

IN THE WEEK

Learn a memory verse. As a family, choose one of the verses below to learn over the course of the week. You could write up the memory verse somewhere and cover words with post-it notes or write out the initial letters only, or try setting it to a familiar tune to help you learn it...

- For younger children: "If the Lord is the true God, follow him." (1 Kings 18 v 21, ICB)
- For older children: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him..." (1 Kings 18 v 21, NIV)

Enjoy singing about who Jesus is. Two songs about the resurrection: "He lives! (An Easter Song)" (Colin Buchanan's *The Easter Hokey Pokey*); "He has Risen!" (Awesome Cutlery's *This is Awesome Cutlery*). Two songs that speak of various ways that Jesus proved his divine identity: "Who is this man?" (*The King the Snake and the Promise*); "Jesus is the King" (*Meet the King*). A song that picks up on the idea of Christ's return to judge as seen in Acts 17: "He is Coming Back Again" (Awesome Cutlery's *All Together Now*). A hymn of praise to the risen Christ: "Christ Is Risen, He Is Risen Indeed" (Keith and Kristyn Getty's *Getty Kids' Hymnal—In Christ Alone*).

Do your children have questions about the resurrection or about the reliability of the Gospel accounts in general? Look together at the evidence for the resurrection and/or the reliability of the Gospels. There are many great written and online resources for this. One I have used is J. Warner Wallace's *Cold Case Christianity for Kids*, which has an accompanying website and partner book for adults. Lee Strobel's well-known *Case for Christ* also has kids' and youth editions. For 8-11-year-olds, look at *How do we know Christianity is Really True?* by Chris Morpheus (out May); for 4-7-year olds, check out *Inspector Smart and the Case of the Empty Tomb* by Michael Tinker.



Acts 17 v 22-34

²² Then Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus. He said, “People of Athens! I see that you are very religious in every way. ²³ As I walked around, I looked carefully at the things you worship. I even found an altar with

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD

written on it. So you don’t know what you are worshipping. Now I am going to tell you about this ‘unknown god.’

²⁴ “He is the God who made the world. He also made everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn’t live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ He is not served by human hands. He doesn’t need anything. Instead, he himself gives life and breath to all people. He also gives them everything else they have. ²⁶ From one man he made all the people of the world. Now they live all over the earth. He decided exactly when they should live. And he decided exactly where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that people would seek him. And perhaps they would reach out for him and find him. They would find him even though he is not far from any of us. ²⁸ ‘In him we live and move and exist.’ As some of your own poets have also said, ‘We are his children.’

²⁹ “Yes, we are God’s children. So we shouldn’t think that God is made out of gold or silver or stone. He isn’t a statue planned and made by clever people. ³⁰ In the past, God didn’t judge people for what they didn’t know. But now he commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins. ³¹ He has set a day when he will judge the world fairly. He has appointed a man to be its judge. God has proved this to everyone by raising that man from the dead.”

³² They heard Paul talk about the dead being raised. Some of them made fun of this idea. But others said, “We want to hear you speak about this again.” ³³ So Paul left the meeting of the Areopagus. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed in Jesus. Dionysius was one of them. He was a member of the Areopagus. A woman named Damaris also became a believer. And so did some others.



TALES THAT TELL THE TRUTH LESSONS

INTRODUCTION



You can use these suggested lesson plans to give you a quick-to-prepare way of engaging with a story in the *Tales That Tell the Truth* Bible storybook series, and with the Scripture that underpins it, helping children to see what it means for them.

Each session includes:

- A “Session Summary” to help the adult leading the session know where it’s going.
- A suggested session for pre-school age children (2-4 years).
- A differentiated lesson plan for children from 5-11, with different activities signalled as being for “Younger” (approximately 5-7 year-old) and “Older” (approximately 8-11 year-old) children. In some instances, there are also possible further questions/activities you can use for older children in a family.

Use what you judge appropriate for your children’s experience, understanding and concentration. (You may find the “younger” questions more helpful for an older child who is unfamiliar with the Bible or the gospel message.) But try to include something from the “Let’s listen to God”, “Let’s think” and “Let’s pray together” sections, as well as the story-telling. Feel free to cover the material in more than one sitting!

Each lesson is put together so that it can be read out directly as it is written, with any explanatory notes for adults included in brackets. It is as light on necessary materials as possible but includes many of the elements your children might be used to from Sunday church:

- An introductory activity that establishes a key concept the children will need to grasp in order to understand the passage.
- Activities to help them engage as they listen to or read the Bible story.
- A story-telling segment that seeks to tell the Bible story in a memorable and visually engaging way. (This involves using part of a book from the *Tales That Tell The Truth* series. In some of the sessions, the book is deliberately read in two parts so that you can look at the Bible before reinforcing the message using the remaining pages of the book.)
- An opportunity to think about a passage of Scripture and what it means, using appropriate questions.
- An activity or discussion that encourages the children to understand what the passage means for us today.
- Encouragement to children to pray in light of what they’ve learnt about Jesus in the lesson.
- Games that reinforce the learning, but that also provide a concentration break and a chance to move around!
- Craft activities, ranging from those requiring minimal resources to more complicated projects.

Each session ends with specific suggestions for ways you can revisit what you have been thinking about over the course of the week. Here are some other ideas for ways to recap what you have learnt:

- Show your craft proudly over Zoom/Skype/Facetime etc... to a family member or friend!
- Replay the game. Can your children remember what it reminds us about Jesus?
- Encourage children to have a go at re-teaching the lesson to their dolls/playmobil/Sylvanian families.
- Read the storybook at bedtime.

As far as is currently allowed, why not try to get together with another family with children of a similar age? You can share around the “leading” and enjoy precious time together!

We pray that these resources will give families and churches a way of engaging their children with Scripture at a time when normal church family life has been disrupted and that they will grow all of us in love for our powerful, loving, saving Lord!