



THE  
DAYS  
OF

ELIJAH

JOHN NOBLE

# THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

## BIBLE STUDY

### Intro

The world of Elijah is a very different place than the one we know today. Great cities such as Rome, Paris and London had yet to be founded. Much of the ancient world's center of gravity was still focused in and around the Middle East.

During Elijah's day the united kingdom of Israel and Judah that had existed under David and Solomon was a fading memory. To the south, the Davidic dynasty limped on as the rulers of Judah. Meanwhile, the northern kingdom of Israel under King Ahab was flourishing and may very well have been at the zenith of its power. Ahab's father, Omri, had founded a new capital at Samaria and ruled over what is generally believed to have been a fertile and prosperous period.

Coupled to this ascendancy was Ahab's marriage to Princess Jezebel of Tyre and Sidon. At this time, the twin Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon sat at the hub of a massive trade network that spanned most of the Mediterranean basin. Over the following centuries the Greeks and Phoenicians would engage in a race to establish colonies and trading posts around the Mediterranean and control this lucrative commerce. The Greeks would found a number of cities including Marseille in southern France and Syracuse in Sicily, while within a century of Elijah's time, the Phoenicians would found the future superpower of Carthage in modern Tunisia.

The marriage of Jezebel and Ahab would likely have brought Israel substantial political and commercial advantages. However, Jezebel would also bring something far more insidious along with her, the worship of Ba'al and Asherah.

Ba'al and Asherah would have been known to the Israelites as part of an elaborate pantheon of various gods worshiped by the surrounding nations. Josephus records that Jezebel's father, Ithobaal, was in fact a priest of Asherah, and so Jezebel herself likely would have been trained as a priestess. This would result in what was essentially a purge of the worshippers of the Hebrew (Big G) God within Israel.

Which is where we begin the story of Elijah.

# The Fledgling Prophet

**Before you get started, I'd strongly suggest reading the entirety of 1 Kings Chapter 17, preferably aloud, just to get a feel for things.**

*Read 1 Kings 17:1*

The biblical narrative of Elijah tells us very little about who Elijah was or where he came from prior to his confronting King Ahab, simply that he was from Tishbe. In the book, *The Days of Elijah*, I speculated that Elijah was most likely a prophet or scribe, this is based upon the fact that the curse Elijah called down upon the land of Israel parallels similar warnings found in the book of Deuteronomy. The most likely reason Elijah would have been familiar with this passage is because he'd received some sort of formal training in it. Regardless of his precise origin though, it would have taken a great deal of courage and faith to confront King Ahab and tell him that God would bring a drought upon Israel.

**What do you think gave Elijah the courage and faith to tell King Ahab that there would be a drought?**

**Do you struggle with confronting people when they are doing something wrong?**

**What do you think is a good way to approach unpleasant conversations like these?**

## The Verse that Started it All

*Read Deuteronomy 11:13-17*

*Read Deuteronomy 28:20-24*

Twice in Deuteronomy Moses promises the Israelites that, if they worship other gods, there will be no rain upon the land. These curses were dramatically fulfilled through Elijah. It's interesting to consider the curses, just sitting there, almost like missiles waiting for someone to come along and push the button to launch them.

It's very popular today to compile little lists of various promises or blessings found in scripture. But in Deuteronomy, while there were many promises and reassurances for the Israelites, there are also a number of stern warnings that had been forgotten as well. The warnings were serious enough that, when King Josiah was read the Book of the

Law several hundred years later, he tore his clothes upon understanding how badly his people had failed God.

**Do you think God still blesses those who are obedient to him and curses those who are disobedient?**

**If not, why not? Or if so, how?**

**Do you have any concrete examples from your own life?**

## **The Kerith Ravine**

*Read 1 Kings 17:2-6*

The Kerith(or Cherith) Ravine was a gorge on the east side of the Jordan River near Elijah's home at Tishbe in the region of Gilead. It likely wouldn't have been far from Elijah's home and some commentators speculate that he might even have already been familiar with the area from his youth. That said, Elijah couldn't go home either, and it was probably very lonely. We don't hear much of Ahab's attempts to find Elijah until later in the story, but it's evident from the lengths Ahab went to that he would have checked Elijah's hometown of Tishbe. Most likely, any attempt to go back where he was well known would have ended in Elijah being captured.

**Have you ever gone through a lonely time when you couldn't be as close to home, family, or friends as you would like?**

**If so, how did it effect you?**

**Have you ever had a time when God has kept you away from a bad situation or circumstance, even though you didn't want Him to?**

# The Ravens

*1 Kings 17:6 (NIV): The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook*

God's choice of ravens to feed Elijah is particularly fascinating. Ravens are typically scavenger birds and were regarded as unclean by the Israelites. At first glance, it's not at all the bird one might expect God to use to feed a prophet. That said, ravens are reasonably intelligent and quite large. Their potential wingspan of more than four feet allows them to carry heavier loads than many smaller birds. Given that Elijah was likely at least somewhat familiar with the rules regarding ritual cleanliness, eating food brought by ravens could have been a very uncomfortable experience. It's also worth noting, that enjoying bread and meat twice a day was far better than the majority of people at the time would have eaten, even during non-famine years.

**Why do you think God chose to use an unclean animal to feed Elijah, as opposed to a clean one?**

**How does God feeding Elijah while the rest of Israel went hungry demonstrate his sovereignty compared to Ba'al, the storm god?**

**Have you ever found yourself in a position where God provided in a way that took you outside your comfort zone?**

*NOTE: Ritual Uncleanliness in the Old Testament wasn't the same thing as sin in the way we usually think of it today. IE Being unclean wasn't the same thing as sinning against God. Most people could become unclean during everyday business for a variety of reasons. Uncleanness could be caused by things as simple as touching a dead body or even basic bodily functions and diseases that didn't really have any sort of intrinsic morality attached to them. Sometimes becoming unclean was simply unavoidable. The rules regarding ritual cleanliness set forth a set of standards someone had to meet in order to go before God at the Temple, and how to ritually purify oneself when that standard was not met. Generally, the Old Testament prescribed a combination of ritual bathing (ablution) and waiting a certain number of days to be ritually cleansed.*

# Dry Times

*Read 1 Kings 17:7*

It's interesting that God waited until the brook in the Kerith Ravine was empty before telling Elijah to leave. In the book, Elijah was nervously getting down to the last trickle of water before God showed up with new instructions. It's easy to see God's hand watching over Elijah, but in the months of anxious waiting he faced, it may have been much harder. It would have been mentally taxing to have to watch things getting worse every day. We often hear people talk about God's timing, but sometimes waiting on God can be scary and plagued with uncertainty, especially when we're in difficult situations.

**How would Elijah's life and story have been different if he hadn't waited on God in the ravine, despite watching the brook dry up?**

**Elijah had the ongoing miracle of the ravens bringing him food to help reassure him that he was not forgotten. What sort of reassurances do we have today that we aren't forgotten?**

**Waiting on God is very important, but sometimes people use the idea of waiting on God as an excuse not to be proactive about making important changes in their own lives. Have you ever struggled with this? If so how?**

## The Word of the Lord

*Read 1 Kings 17:8*

The Word of the Lord comes to Elijah several times throughout his life, usually without much elaboration about what specifically that entailed. Many other times throughout the Old Testament the Word of the Lord comes to various prophets, and we rarely learn how that actually works. Possibly it was different for everyone who experienced it. In the Days of Elijah I speculate that the Word of the Lord comes to Elijah here as a powerful earthquake, but that's just speculation.

**How do you think the Word of the Lord might have come to Elijah? Was it a powerful force, maybe a quiet whisper, or maybe something else?**

**How has God communicated to you in your own life?**

**Have you had the Word of the Lord communicated in a truly amazing or overpowering experience? If so, what happened?**

## **A Woman Alone**

*Read 1 Kings 17:9*

This is possibly one of the most entertaining verses in the story. It also strikes me as some of the strongest evidence that the story of Elijah wasn't just *made up* by later Jewish writers. Because this command really is stranger than fiction. In this era, widows were near the bottom of the societal ladder. Without a husband, they typically had minimal means to provide for themselves, and if they had children from their marriage, caring for those children would be a massive drain on their already limited resources. Additionally, since they had been previously married, they would have been much less likely than younger, unmarried virgins to find another husband. This meant their main door to climbing back up the socio-economic ladder was, if not shut, at least partially closed. With their career opportunities severely limited, most widows definitely wouldn't have had the resources to provide for themselves and a live-in guest even in the best of times, definitely not during a famine. My sneaking suspicion is that when Elijah thought about this, he was probably a little skeptical himself.

**God had provided for Elijah for likely six months to a year by now. Even so, do you think he struggled being told to do something that, to him, wouldn't have made any sense?**

**Has God ever asked you to do things that don't make sense at the time?**

**Assuming you've done it anyway, did you discover why God was asking you to step out in faith? How did that impact your trust in God?**

## **Sidon**

*1 Kings 17:9 (NIV): Go at once to Zaraphath of Sidon*

Sidon was a major port city in the region of Phoenicia. It and Tyre were ruled by Ithobaal, Queen Jezebel's father and a priest of Asherah who had usurped the throne, much like King Ahab's father, Omri. Although Tyre would eventually be razed by Alexander the Great, at this point Tyre was a commercial powerhouse. Eighty years before, Hiram(or Hiram) the King of Tyre had sold Solomon the cedar for building the temple in Jerusalem.

Both cities were also hubs for the worship of Baal and Asherah.

In *Against Apion 1:18*, Josephus records that Hiram of Tyre also built new temples for Astarte (Asherah) and Hercules (likely Melqart, another God in the Phoenician Pantheon).

To understand the situation in a modern context, God sending Elijah to Zaraphath in Phoenicia, is like someone going to China or Saudi Arabia to avoid religious persecution. Located literally down the road from the birthplace of Queen Jezebel, it's about the last place a prophet of the Lord would want to end up.

**In this time, many people believed that various gods were local deities whose power waned the further one went from them geographically. How does God sending Elijah into the center of Phoenicia demonstrate his own power?**

**How does God's wisdom sometimes confound our own knowledge of situations?**

**How can trusting God in uncomfortable situations help us to grow?**

*Note: In case you're still puzzling over my mention of Hercules earlier, the Greeks and Romans had an irritating habit of re-naming local gods. They tend to refer to other people's deities in terms of their own pantheon. For example, Tacitus in Germania (9) claims that the Germans worshiped Mercury, Hercules, Ares, and Isis of the Suebi. Isis being an Egyptian mother goddess popular in Rome.*

*At first glance this is laughable, until you realize that Mercury(Odin), Hercules(Thor), Ares(Tyr) and Isis(possibly Freyja). At which point we realize that the normally moralistic Tacitus isn't just telling boldfaced lies and we can rest easy again.*

## **A Chance Meeting**

*Read 1 Kings 17:10-12*

When Elijah comes to Zarephath, he sees a woman gathering sticks at the front gate. Likely she is digging around what is basically a scrap wood pile. This is where locals would have dumped off broken branches, old wood, shattered pottery, things like that. There's some speculation that this was actually the general city dump as well, but organic trash would of course stink, and ancient people didn't like it in their city any more than we do today. Since Zarephath was located along the Mediterranean, much of the worst smelling trash may, very well, have been disposed of in the most ancient and reliable of fashions – by dumping it into the ocean.

Regardless, Elijah encounters the woman and asks for water and bread. By modern standards it's an odd request. However, in the ancient near east, where hospitality was regarded as a virtue, fast food wasn't as much of a thing outside major cities, and where one on one encounters were more common due to the lack of cars, it's not that unusual.

To demonstrate - Read Job 31:29-34

This is Job's final defense of his actions as being blameless, and it's worth noting that he includes showing hospitality to strangers as part of his moral defense of his actions. In the modern world we don't always see hospitality as that important, but the people of the ancient near east clearly valued it highly.

In the book, the widow, Dema, is doing a decent job of putting on a façade and being polite to everyone around her, even despite the seriousness of her situation. Everyone else is going about their lives while she hovers right on the edge of life and death.

Interestingly, she feels strongly enough about hospitality, that she's ashamed to admit that she has no bread to give Elijah. Her inability to offer him anything seems to push her over the edge and prompts her to break down and explain that she and her son are starving, and that's why she has nothing to give.

**Have you ever put on an *It's okay* face around your friends and family when your life was actually going horribly?**

**In the case of the widow, it takes Elijah making an impossible request to get her to confess that she's literally planning on dying. Why have you, or people you've known, been reluctant to ask for help or admit what's going on, even in the midst of a disaster?**

**Are there people around you who are suffering and who might not know how to ask for help?**

## **Impossible Things**

*Read 1 Kings 17:13-14*

Here Elijah makes a pretty wild pronouncement – that God will supply the widow and her son with food until the famine ends. One thing that's particularly fascinating, is that it's actually unclear if God specifically told Elijah to say this or if Elijah just saw the woman's need, realized that this was the widow God had sent him to, and understood that God would meet her needs. Regardless, the faith and courage to say something like that to someone you barely know and trust that God has things handled is amazing. In the book, Dema reveals more than a little trepidation, but eventually decides she has nothing to lose by taking a chance on a stranger.

**Has God ever made you a promise that seems impossible? What was your reaction?**

**Do you think God specifically told Elijah what to say or if he just saw the need and trusted in God's power to meet it?**

**Put yourself in the place of the widow, not knowing how things would turn out. If someone you barely knew told you the same thing Elijah did, what would your first reaction be?**

## **Faith**

*Read 1 Kings 7:15-16*

*She went away and did as Elijah had told her.*

How much faith does it take to see a miracle? Some people say a lot, others say very little. I'd contend that, at least in this case, it only required enough faith for the widow to act, no more no less. I know there have been times in my own life where I've struggled with having faith. While writing the Days of Elijah, I was also struggling to find a permanent job. The job I did have wasn't going very well, and I felt like I was climbing an endless sandhill of discouragement. I'd been struggling for several years, and there were a lot of days where I didn't have much faith left that God even cared, let alone that things would change. Sometimes there was just the knowledge that I needed to keep going that remained, and the decision to do that, even if it felt hopeless. I suppose that's a type of faith in its own fashion. I imagine Dema may have been getting to the point where it's scary to let yourself believe, and all you can really do is take one more step and hope the world changes.

**Have you found yourself struggling for something that seemed hopeless?**

**In the book, before Elijah shows up, Dema's friend tries to cheer her up, inviting her to go pray to Ba'al for rain, but not really recognizing that Dema had much more immediate needs. Have you ever struggled with people trying to cheer you up in a bad situation, with what felt like empty words that didn't help with your actual problems?**

**Has God ever provided for you in a truly miraculous way? How?**

# Why Her?

*Read Luke 4:14-30*

Everyone, at some point, will ask themselves a simple question. Why is this happening to me? The question can have positive or negative connotations, but here Jesus broaches a very important point, why was Elijah sent to the widow in Zarephath? Why not someone else? If you read later in the story, 1 Kings 19:18, God claims that he had reserved seven thousand in Israel who hadn't bowed before Ba'al. Surely there must have been an impoverished widow among them? So why a woman in the land of unbelievers? There's no real evidence given that the woman was uniquely special. I've heard a bit of speculation that perhaps she had some knowledge of God, but from the way she says *The Lord your God* in verse 12, it seems unlikely that she worshiped God. She might have simply known that her neighbors twenty miles across the border had a different religion.

Jesus's words in Luke come in the context of the people of his hometown of Nazareth rejecting him as a prophet. They could possibly imply that maybe no one in Israel would have truly welcomed Elijah for the duration of the famine. Although they could also be understood in the context of God extending mercy to those who don't deserve it over those who might feel entitled to it. I suppose it's also fair to say that He's God and He has the prerogative to rescue who he chooses. And perhaps there's a very good reason that we simply don't know.

Matthew Henry summarizes the situation:

*Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, and some, it is likely, would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes the first prophet of the Gentiles. Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to show her how powerless was her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her own country. The person appointed to entertain Elijah is not one of the rich or great men of Sidon; but a poor widow woman, in want, and desolate, is made both able and willing to sustain him. It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of, and put honour upon, the weak and foolish things of the world.*

**Have you ever received a huge blessing that you didn't really deserve?  
If so what was it?**

**Why do you think God chooses to use the weak and foolish things of  
the world?**

**Do you have any ideas why God might have sent Elijah to a widow in Zarephath? Is there something going on here that you think has been overlooked? Perhaps some practical reasons?**

## **The Secrets of Tyre**

There's no verse for this section, but this is a good place to discuss the Tyrian religion. Looking back at the final question from the previous section, we can tender a couple possible reasons why God might have sent Elijah to Phoenicia. First, from a practical safety standpoint, Zarephath is about the last place King Ahab would have thought to look for Elijah.

There's a second possibility as well. You see, Ba'al worship was... Well, let's let the Roman historian Diodorus explain in his discussion of the wars in Sicily between the Greeks and Carthage. Here the Greeks have just landed in North Africa, won a great victory and besieged Carthage. Remember two key things, Carthage was a colony of Tyre, and the Roman's tended to mis-identify foreign gods.

***Therefore the Carthaginians, believing that the misfortune had come to them from the gods, betook themselves to every manner of supplication of the divine powers; and, because they believed that Heracles(Melqart), who was worshipped in their mother city, was exceedingly angry with them, they sent a large sum of money and many of the most expensive offerings to Tyre. Since they had come as colonists from that city, it had been their custom in the earlier period to send to the god a tenth of all that was paid into the public revenue; but later, when they had acquired great wealth and were receiving more considerable revenues, they sent very little indeed, holding the divinity of little account. But turning to repentance because of this misfortune, they bethought them of all the gods of Tyre. They even sent from their temples in supplication the golden shrines with their images, believing that they would better appease the wrath of the god if the offerings were sent for the sake of winning forgiveness. They also alleged that Cronus(Editor's note: Ba'al or Molech) had turned against them, inasmuch as, in former times, they had been accustomed to sacrifice to this god the noblest of their sons, but more recently, secretly buying and nurturing children, they had sent these to the sacrifice; and when an investigation was made, some of those who had been sacrificed were discovered to have been supposititious. When they had given thought to these things and saw their enemy encamped before their walls, they were filled with superstitious dread, for they believed that they had neglected the honours of the gods that had been established by their fathers. In their zeal to make amends for***

***their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly; and others who were under suspicion sacrificed themselves voluntarily, in number not less than three hundred. There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus, extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.***

So, yeah... there's that too. The time they got together and decided to murder their children because that's what their parents used to do back in the day.

Zarephath sat about ten miles north of Tyre, a short day's walk, and it feels unlikely that Elijah never stopped by the city in what could easily have been two years living at Zarephath. It's speculation, but it's entirely possible that part of why God placed him there, was so that he could grasp what was really at stake in the fight against Ba'al.

**Part of why the Carthaginians continued to sacrifice their children seems to be because it was a long tradition. Are there any traditions, or simply common-place practices in society that are taken for granted but perhaps should be re-examined?**

**In ancient Carthage, archeologists have found a number of infant remains placed in urns and bearing inscriptions asking the gods to "hear their voice and bless them." The idea seems to be that children were sacrificed for material gain or blessing? Today, child sacrifice is strictly taboo, but have you ever sacrificed relationships with other people, for material goods or other favors? Why can that be so tempting to do?**

**It's easy to say the ancient Phoenicians didn't care about their children. But they sacrificed their children because they regarded a child as the most valuable thing they had to offer the gods. With that in mind, do you think they are different or similar to us today? (Note: There's not necessarily a correct answer.)**

# Why?

*Read 1 Kings 17:17-18*

One of the things I've become convinced of when writing, is that there are a few rare but important times when the quality of words is less relevant than the quantity. When reading, just like in real life, it takes actual time for the emotion of what's happening to sink in. Sometimes that means that impactful scenes have to be longer in order to connect. It's the same reason movies tend to slow down when a major character dies. It takes a moment for people to register *Oh, that just happened*. And because these two verses cover several days and a real rollercoaster of emotions, I think it's very easy to read these verses and not feel much. And that misses what actually happened.

A kid got sick, probably not bad at first, but getting worse and worse. A boy that Elijah knew, probably liked, probably counted as a friend. His Mom was worried, perhaps a physician was called, and friends came over to try and help. Elijah tried to help. He probably prayed and asked God for the boy to get better... and nothing happened. Then the boy died. And in the numb aftermath, Elijah finds himself sitting across from a woman who doesn't know why this happened to her, and who blames him and his God for the way things turned out.

In the Days of Elijah, Elijah has just traveled to Tyre where he discovered what the Tyrians are doing in the name of Ba'al worship. The woman, Dema wonders if perhaps this is God's revenge on her for what the Tyrians are doing to their own children and accuses Elijah of bringing this trouble on her.

**Put yourself in the widow's place for a moment. How would you feel about all this?**

**Have you ever felt like God brought trouble on you as some sort of punishment? Discuss.**

**Are there times when you've prayed for something really important, only to feel left out in the cold when you didn't receive it?**

**Do you still feel that way? Or has your perspective shifted over time?**

## Miracles at Dawn

Hop back and now *Read 1 Kings 17:17-24*

This scene is the first time in the Bible that someone returns from the dead. What makes it particularly fascinating is that it's not someone very important. If this were a fantasy novel, you might expect the main character to die, then be resurrected in a moment of transformative power. In this case, maybe Ahab finally kills Elijah and throws his body outside the city. Then Elijah stands up and uses his firebending superpowers to blast Samaria in some sort of titanic battle. Then dragons show up. It would be amazing, and someone would want to make a movie about it, and....

Well, we digress.

Here though, it's the opposite of what you would expect. The widow's son is never even named. He never shows up again at all. He wasn't uniquely special or even that important to the story. If he had died it would have been sad, and life would have gone on. At worst the widow kicks out Elijah and he finds somewhere else to live. Given everything that's happened, that's not a difficult thing for God to arrange.

And yet the boy comes back to life.

Why?

You could hop over to James 5:16 - *The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. (NLT)*

This helps. But all the same, Elijah certainly wasn't the first righteous person to lose someone they cared about. Perhaps it's because the boy was a child? Maybe because the widow needed someone to care for her after Elijah was gone? Maybe Elijah needed to understand the true power of God and to not be afraid of what would come later? There's an argument that Elijah's persistence played a role. If he'd given up after the first or second attempts, maybe we'd be reading a very different story. Maybe Elijah was just the guy who kept knocking until God answered?

I'll end by pointing out a very deliberate contrast that God may have intended. I mentioned earlier that Ba'al worship likely involved infant sacrifice. So perhaps this is God being the opposite of Ba'al. This is God saving a child from the dead while Ba'al consumes them.

**Why do you think God resurrected the woman's son?**

**The woman accuses Elijah of bringing trouble upon her, but one could also argue that Elijah was sent to her precisely to save her son. Have you ever been in a situation where God sent you someone for reasons you didn't understand until later?**

**While it's rare to meet people who have been brought back from the dead, has God ever radically altered the trajectory of your own life in a single powerful experience?**

## **1001 Nights in Zarephath**

**Before going ahead, I'd encourage you to read 1 Kings 18 in its entirety.**

*Read 1 Kings 18:1-2*

So, it begins. After three and a half years of drought, Elijah is finally told to return to Israel. God will send rain, and the saga begun when Elijah called down a curse upon the land will come to its conclusion. But that also means something else.

It means goodbye.

After at least two years and everything that's happened between them, Elijah and the widow have to say goodbye. It's never recorded if Elijah went back to see them. But it's nice to think that he did, saw the child that he saved from the grave all grown up. But in the moment, even that possibility must have seemed very far off, because Elijah knew exactly who he was going to see, King Ahab.

Perhaps though, that wasn't such a scary prospect anymore. The last time Elijah had seen King Ahab was before he'd been fed by ravens. Before he'd eaten from a flour pot that never ran empty, and a jug that could tip over and flood the world. Before he'd prayed and seen a boy resurrected. A lot had happened since last time to make Elijah brave enough to go. But I still suspect it hurt badly to leave the two people he'd spent so much time with.

**Has God ever put you in a situation where you had to wait a long time for something to happen? If so, how did God communicate that to you?**

**Have you ever been called to leave the people close to you and go somewhere else? How did you react?**

**In the book, God speaks to Elijah out of a raging fire to command him to return to Ahab. If God has ever communicated that you need to leave the place you're in, how did He do that? Were you afraid to go?**

## **Meanwhile**

*Read 1 Kings 18:2-6*

Meanwhile, things were going badly back home. Very badly. In the modern world of reservoir lakes and sprinkler systems, sometimes we lose our grasp of just how dependent we are on simple things like rain. If we want to live in Death Valley, not a problem, your water, fuel and food gets trucked in. Plus, you install one heck of an air conditioning unit. Maybe throw up a bunch of solar panels to keep down your electricity bill. The main inconvenience is probably getting your internet hooked up.

We forget that King Ahab had none of that. If the rains didn't come, nothing grew, and they had to buy food from Egypt where the annual Nile floods and a complex irrigation system meant they could thrive even without rain. At least, so long as the money didn't run out.

Then there's the water problem. Much of the water in the region came from underground aquifers tapped by wells. That underground water offered some buffer against a drought, although a number of wells likely would have run dry and needed to be deepened as the groundwater gradually depleted.

The other giant issue would have been forage. The ancient Israelites used horses, mules, donkeys, and camels for transport. Those all require grass to survive. No rain meant no grass, which effectively meant even carting in food became a struggle. Even tax revenues would have suffered, as many ancient taxes were paid as a portion of the harvest, which without rain, would have been rapidly trending towards zero.

**Most of Israel would have been starving by the time Elijah returned. Among them were at least some people like Obadiah who still worshiped God. How can sins on a national level effect even devout people within that nation?**

**Do you see any parallels in the modern world, where national sins impact everyone in a nation?**

**Three and a half years is a long time in a world where even a year of drought was catastrophic. A lot of people would have been hurt in that final year of drought. Why do you think God waited so long before sending Elijah back to Israel?**

## **An Unexpected Rendezvous**

*Read 1 Kings 18:7-15*

We don't actually know what Elijah was planning to do before he bumped into Obadiah. Presumably he was going to Samaria where he intended to stroll into Ahab's palace. Given the lengths Ahab had gone to find him, he likely wouldn't have received a warm reception. And yet, it turns out that all along God has had his own meeting arranged, regardless of whatever Elijah had planned.

I've had a few experiences in my own life where I've asked God what to do, and gotten back, *it doesn't matter*, which seemed ridiculous, because it certainly mattered to me. Then, when I finally chose, I discovered God had already handled the situation so that the choice was made for me. I just didn't know it until afterwards.

Hand in hand with that though, Elijah actually *was* on a schedule if he wanted to make God's meeting, even if he didn't know it. In the novel, Elijah struggles with saying goodbye to the widow and her son. She asks him to stay for just a few more days. It would have been easy, after a thousand nights in Zarephath, what's one more? And yet, one more could have been the difference between meeting Obadiah on the road and going all the way to Samaria. After everything that had happened, I'm confident God would have brought Elijah out of Samaria alive, one way or another. But it might have been far more complicated, particularly with an extremely foul tempered Jezebel stalking around.

**Have you ever experienced a time where God had a situation arranged for you, but you didn't realize that until you stepped out in faith? What happened?**

**Has God ever had you on a time sensitive mission, even if you didn't know it? How did it go?**

**Obviously, when God tells you to do something, it's not always immediate. If you're told to go plant a church, that usually takes some planning and time. If God wants you to go talk to someone, the level of urgency could vary between calling them right now, and talking to them next time you meet? How do you tell how urgent a command is?**

## **Obadiah**

*Re-Read 1 Kings 18:3-16*

Obadiah(King Ahab's Steward, not to be confused with the prophet Obadiah) is only mentioned in this brief section, but clearly he has encountered Elijah before, probably from the first time Elijah delivered his ultimatum to Ahab. It's speculated that Obadiah might have been the wife of the poor widow in 2 Kings 4, but otherwise that's all we hear about him. From the preceding verses though, it's evident that Obadiah was a very pious man who served a notably impious king and queen.

**Have you ever found yourself working in an environment that's hostile to your beliefs?**

**How did you cope/react?**

**Obadiah's access and position gave him the tools he needed to help others, even though he was working within a deeply unjust system. Do you see any parallel opportunities to help others in your own life?**

# The Challenge

*Read 1 Kings 18:16-19*

We discussed earlier that it's unclear what exactly Elijah was planning to do before he ran into Obadiah. We also can't say for certain if God ever gave him specific instructions beyond returning to Ahab. Commentators don't spend much time on the issue, but generally seem of the view that Elijah chose Mount Carmel himself as a good spot for his challenge. The word Carmel (not to be confused with the popular confectionary) signifies garden or park. Under normal circumstances the mountain was a verdant seaside retreat. *Mount Carmel* is more accurately a large hill some thirty-five miles south of Tyre. It is crossed with gullies and rocky ravines that look out across the Mediterranean Sea. It would have functioned as a public place in which Elijah could challenge the priests in full view of everyone. As neutral ground, it also would have prevented any sort of trickery, as well as accusations that might have been leveled against Elijah himself of deceit. It was a place where everyone could watch.

**Has God ever given you very general directions and left you to carry them out?**

**Does this sort of situation leave you feeling paralyzed or empowered? Why?**

**Issuing the challenge to meet at Mount Carmel was a big step of faith for Elijah. There were a lot of things he didn't know about what would happen next and he was leaving himself entirely reliant on God to show up. Have you ever taken a big step of faith with a huge amount on the line? Explain?**

# All the Marbles

*Read 1 Kings 18:20-25*

And so, we arrive. The priests of Ba'al show up in all their flamboyant garb as a small army, while King Ahab and his retinue watch from nearby. It's not said where the 400 priests of Asherah are during this process, but we can reasonably assume they declined Elijah's invitation. Jezebel, likely a priestess of Asherah herself, is also not mentioned as being present. Possibly she suspected some sort of trap and kept the priests of Asherah away from the meeting. Since Ba'al was reckoned a powerful storm god in his own right, it's also possible that Ahab felt the hundreds of priests of Ba'al alone could easily handle things.

Regardless, Elijah makes a public challenge so that the priests can't back down. With everyone watching, they have no choice but to accept.

**Elijah issues the challenge not by claiming that his God is real and Ba'al is a lie, but rather by saying the Israelites should figure out who the real God is and follow Him. Do you think this method of encouraging people to seek the truth is more persuasive than asserting what you believe to be true? Why or Why not?**

**The people in the crowd are the same ones who have been slowly starving for three years due to the famine. In theory they should be happy for all this to end. So why do you think at the end of verse 21 they are initially silent?**

**Why do you think Elijah allows the Priests of Ba'al to take their turn first?**

## The Priests of Ba'al

*Read 1 Kings 18:26-29*

Without delving too deeply into ancient ritual practices, most ancient religions represented a sort of trade between people and their gods. Fundamentally, they were attempting to solve a basic problem. The gods like Ba'al were obviously powerful, but

they weren't generally interested in helping average people with said power. So how to access that power?

To do that you had to attract the gods attention and gain their favor. There were several ways. As mentioned here, bloodletting, dancing and chanting, along with various sorts of sacrifices were all seen as ways to attract a certain god's notice. Other details like the time of day were also significant and might explain why Elijah begins to taunt the priest around noon, when the sun was at its zenith. Although Ba'al was not the Mesopotamian sun god, it's entirely possible the priests thought their best shot at having him light their altar would come around midday.

At its core, ancient Mesopotamian religion was based on the idea that gods like Ba'al controlled the rain that humans needed, while humans had the ability to offer services which the gods wanted, particularly sacrifices. With this logic and a knowledgeable priest on your side, you could do a trade with the god. You got the divine power you needed, while they got the sacrifices they needed. Although, obviously today said trade was not going particularly well.

*Note: Another method to draw a god's attention was what were called votive offerings, basically promising to give something valuable to the deity in exchange for a certain outcome. These offerings, be they gold, clothes, food, ect, were promised then delivered when whatever you requested occurred. They operated similarly to a modern contract. Generally, these votive offerings were given to the temple of the deity involved, and popular temples could quickly become very crowded and extremely rich. The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi, who was consulted by people from across Greece, is a notable example and amassed a substantial treasury.*

*Votive offerings are similar to sacrifices in that both involved giving up something, however, votive offerings usually aren't burned. Also, particularly in ancient Greece, they were promised to the god beforehand and deposited only after the desired blessing was granted. Sacrifices could occur either before or after the fact, but were usually offered beforehand. A notable example being the famous Trojan Horse which was ostensibly built as an offering to Poseidon, whose sacred animal was a horse, to ensure the retreating Greeks safe passage home. Obviously, the Trojan Horse is somewhat mythical, but it illustrates how ancient people approached their gods.*

**How can we often slip into this *religion is a trade* mindset when we interact with God? How can that damage our relationship with God?**

**It's easy to look at the priests of Ba'al and assume they secretly knew this was all a bunch of nonsense, but they seem very fervent in their prayers. Do you think they really believed Ba'al would answer them?**

**By waiting to go last, Elijah lets everyone witness the dances and shouts of the Priests of Ba'al. While their dances may have seemed intimidating at first, as it grew obvious that nothing was happening Elijah begins to mock them. Have you been in a situation before where the forces opposing you seem frightening at first, only to discover they weren't as powerful as you thought?**

## **An Altar for the Lord**

*Read 1 Kings 18:30-33*

*Read Exodus 29:38-41*

One advantage of letting the Priests of Ba'al go first is that, after slicing themselves to ribbons and shouting themselves hoarse at a multi-hour religious disco bash, they're really too tired to interrupt. Going back to how the priests of Ba'al may have put their highest hopes in receiving an answer at midday, Elijah waits until later, the time of the prescribed evening sacrifice.

It's also of great interest how Elijah calls the people over. He's not recorded as saying that much. But given the explanation for why he rebuilds the altar with twelve stones, my personal view is that he spoke to the people as he worked. Explaining. Reminding them of who they'd once been, how they'd been God's people, and they'd forgotten.

I could waste another paragraph summarizing, but I figured I'd just include an excerpt from the book below. How I imagine the scene might have gone.

Elijah was tempted to keep toying with the priests, but with the sun past midday he got the sense it was his time now. Ignoring the screams from the other side of the hill, he stood and gestured everyone in close. "Come here to me."

Everyone had made plenty of space for the dancing priests, but slowly, almost timid at first, his countrymen pushed in close. Many of them still didn't look very happy with him, but they looked even less happy with Ba'al.

Fortunately, he didn't have to go scavenging for stones to repair the ruin of the altar. There were

plenty all around. Elijah stooped down to lift a large block, hauling it over and setting it as a base. He spoke to the crowd as he worked. "You have all heard of our forefathers. First was Abraham, who was called out of a far land to come here, then his son Isaac and his son Jacob. When Jacob was young, he fled away to Haran and lived there for many years. When he returned, he met the Lord God across the Jordan, not Ba'al or Asherah, but the God of our forefathers."

His voice paused a moment as he strained to push another bulky stone over to pile on the altar.

"Jacob met the Lord in a place called Peniel, near Succoth. That night Jacob was alone and a man came close and they fought till morning, but Jacob clung to the man. It was there that the Lord gave him a new name and said 'Your name shall be Israel. For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.' And so our father Jacob became Israel."

"Now Jacob had twelve sons from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel, the fathers to us all. For many years they were captives in Egypt, slaves. But the Lord raised up Moses and with mighty works of God set our people free, leading us to this land here. For a time we were one people, not Israel and Judah split in two, and all went down to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the true God. And just as there are twelve tribes and twelve sons of Jacob, there are twelve stones on the altar of the Lord."

As he finished, Elijah stepped back to observe the altar he had repaired, a simple affair, but it would work. "Bring me wood for the fire," he commanded the people nearby and the word passed back into the crowd. While he waited, Elijah set aside his robe, instead putting on an old rag of a tunic. He then dug a shallow trench around the altar and told them more. About the beginning of all things with Adam and Eve, about Joshua and how God had driven out the Canaanites to give them a homeland. About the sins of Israel long ago, and the judges God had raised up and appointed over them. About King David and Solomon, about a time almost forgotten before Ahab and his father Omri, before there were two kingdoms. Before Ba'al and Asherah had been the gods of Israel.

When the wood finally arrived, he spread the bundles on his simple altar, and gestured forward the servant who'd been holding the halter of the second sacrificial bull.

The stroke was quick, no blow to the head or crushing cut to the throat, just a simple, quick slice. The bull barely seemed to notice the severed artery, and instead stood there for several seconds before its eyes abruptly drifted shut and the animal passed out, crumpling to the ground. Elijah put a bowl beneath the neck to collect the blood, and looked back to the crowd, giving the animal several minutes to fully die.

"And the Lord spoke to our father Moses," he explained to the gathering crowd, "saying, 'the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.' The God your fathers worshipped is not like Ba'al, he does not *need* our offerings. He does not feast on burnt meat and poured out wine; instead he has given sacrifices to us – a gift, a way to seek atonement and forgiveness for our transgressions. A way to be made right with him."

Elijah turned back to the bull and got to the messy job of cutting up the deceased animal to prepare the sacrifice, talking as he worked. "The God of our fathers also spoke to Moses, telling what would happen if we were to forget him. That he would turn the sky above us to bronze and the ground to iron. And so He has."

He paused and looked up from his work, his eyes meeting so many others staring back. "I know some of you – maybe most of you – look at me and see the person who stole your rain and your orchard and your vineyard. But this is all bigger than me, even than us. These were promises and vows made with God Himself back before our parent's parents were born. And we have forgotten."

His gaze swept the crowd, "You are all here because you want rain for the crops, water for the rivers, and you think that it's mine to give. But the rain belongs to God and He asks something more than just your presence here, He asks that you remember Him and the promises from long ago. Promises that if we kept his commandments, He would bless the land and bless us all. That's what the Lord wants, that we would be His people and He would be our God."

Elijah finished dressing the bull and laid the pieces on the wood of the altar. When he turned back

to the crowd watching him, he saw curious looks on many faces, like they finally understood. Like for the first time, they saw clear as day who God was and what He wanted of them.

His mind wandered back to his time traveling the country, telling of the impending drought. It had been so rare to see faces like that and even rarer that they could go from scowling at him to nodding along with his words.

Suddenly it made perfect sense why. He'd come to them decreeing God's judgement, expecting that they understood and just didn't care. But he saw it differently now, *they hadn't known*, so how could they have cared? Suddenly, he wished it hadn't taken all this just for him to tell the truth and for them to hear it.

Perhaps things couldn't have gone any other way though, he mused. Maybe only *here* was he able to tell in a way everyone understood and only *here* were they ready to listen.

Regardless, Elijah felt a smile tugging at his lips, and not the vindictive smirk from watching the Priests of Ba'al exhaust themselves pleading to their god, but a genuinely beaming grin at what he saw in the crowd before him.

Elijah stepped back and regarded his altar with a satisfied nod. There was just one thing left, to prove that the Lord truly was God.

**By rebuilding the altar with twelve stones Elijah calls attention to the fact that Israel and Judah used to be one people worshiping one God. Why is that significant?**

**How can reminding people of who they are, or used to be, impact and change them?**

**Have you ever forgotten who you were and needed to be reminded? If so, who are you now?**

# Wet Altars

*Read 1 Kings 18:33-35*

Sometimes people take a dip in the crazy end of the pool. This is one of those times. It's rare for someone to ask God for something then intentionally make that thing more difficult for God to grant. The only other example I can think of is Gideon, when he sent home most of his army, but he had God telling him to do that. Here Elijah alone is making the calls. But, while he might have grinned at seeing everyone's confusion, Elijah isn't just playing around either. While dousing the sacrifice would make it harder for a normal fire to be lit, it would also serve as indisputable proof that he hadn't cheated and somehow lit the fire himself. By raising the stakes, he also made sure that he had everyone's complete attention.

**Elijah wanted to ensure that the prophets of Ba'al couldn't claim that he had cheated and tricked everyone. He also wanted to leave no doubt in people's minds what had happened. Do you sometimes find that your witness to others is tainted by decisions you make?**

**Is there a path you could take to help make your message indisputable?**

**If you were there, rooting for Elijah, what would you be thinking as he doused the sacrifice with water?**

# The Fires of Heaven

*Read 1 Kings 18:36-38*

I'll just ask you to read... and imagine.

Elijah looked up to see the sun had vanished, hidden away behind a towering white cloud with a veiled brightness like the sun itself blazing from within. More peals of thunder shook the day, an earthquake in the sky, each punctuated by a dazzling flash from within the glowing cloud.

As he watched, the base of the cloud tore open. A silver white fire, like a lance of pure lightning, stabbed down on the altar in a blinding flash. Elijah lowered his head closer to the

ground and pressed his eyes tightly shut as a hurricane of silvery flame whirled overhead, pulsing off waves of heat and tongues of wind that threatened to pull him from the ground.

The thunder overhead grew to a constant, deafening roar, so powerful it sent shudders through the ground. When Elijah dared to peek his eyes open he saw the dust around him being swept up into the cyclone, glowing like a shower of tiny embers as it was pulled into the vortex.

The fire blazed so hot Elijah was sure he himself was about to burst into flames, but finally the inferno lessened and Elijah dared to look towards heaven. The silver fire drew back into the cloud that now glowed painfully bright, spilling out flashes of pure golden lightning that lanced across the sky and vanished on the horizon. Slowly that dimmed, like he'd just witnessed a window into heaven itself and now it was closing. The majestic cloud began to spin itself to pieces, blasted apart by the last lingering traces of power.

Soon the sky had returned to its normal teal and the sun slid back into view, although now it seemed a pale imitation of what they'd just witnessed. All was almost the same as before, except for the altar – the altar was gone.

In its place sat a charred patch of ground scraped completely bare. The bull, the wood, the water in the trench, even the altar stones were completely gone, blasted into nothingness. For a second, Elijah stared at the spot in shocked disbelief; he'd been expecting a spark from the sky, not so much a silvery pillar of annihilation, but that worked too.

The prophet Elijah seemed to have had two very powerful things on his side. The knowledge that he was walking in God's will, and the courage to take the next step, even when he had essentially stacked the deck against himself with a soaking wet altar.

**Have you ever experienced a Mount Carmel moment, where you risked everything on God and God answered in an indisputably powerful way?**

**Elijah prays that God would answer him, not because he is special, or God owes him, but so that God would be known in Israel and the hearts of the people would turn back to Him. Do we often pray this way, or do our prayers have different motivations? Why?**

**Elijah was confident that he was following God's will when he asked for God to turn the hearts of the people back to him. What are some specific ways to find that same certainty in our own lives, that we are following and living out God's will?**

**On Mount Carmel Elijah had the courage to trust God to take care of things in His own way. Obviously, Elijah had some pretty remarkable experiences to bring him to this point, but even so, it must have required tremendous faith to risk it all on God answering in the way he wanted at the time he wanted. What are some opportunities for you to have that sort of faith in your own life?**

## Fallen Idols

*Read 1 Kings 18:39-40*

*Read Deuteronomy 13:1-5*

The Kishon ravine is situated at the northern base of Mount Carmel where the Kishon river runs into the Mediterranean. After years of drought it would have been reduced to a trickle, but still sufficed for the people to kill the priests of Ba'al.

If you dwell on this very long, especially from a modern viewpoint, it's quite scary. Earlier on we heard about how Jezebel had tried to murder the prophets of the Lord, and now Elijah returns the favor writ large.

A couple things about the situation. First, the story must be viewed in context, God just showed up and sent down fire from the sky, there was no doubt who the real God was. And second, these were people who had just deceived the entire nation into worshiping Ba'al and brought about three years of famine. People had watched their friends and loved ones starve and suffer and die, because the priests of Ba'al had lied to them about God and brought judgement upon them all. That tends to change one's outlook.

Finally, had the priests lived, they would have returned to Samaria, defeated, but being priests of Ba'al was kind of their job, it was how they put food on the table, literally. After a lifetime learning chants and prayers and rituals, it's not simple to swap careers. Some might have left, but what of the ones that stayed? Eventually they'd return to preaching Ba'al.

Of course, it's easy to think that no one would have believed them after what they had just seen. But remember why Elijah was there in the first place, because Israel forgot God, even after seeing far greater wonders than this. As we see later in the Book of Kings, Israel would forget, and there would be more curses. Death would come, armies would raze the land, and children would burn, all because Israel forgot. In that context Elijah's actions hopefully make a bit more sense.

That's said, it's easy to simply see the priests of Ba'al as a bunch of bad people who got what they deserved. But doing so forgets that, these are four hundred and fifty people, many of them were probably very sincere young men. I have little doubt that many of the leaders of the cult of Ba'al were likely a very nasty sort. But in an age where the priesthood was regarded as a very high and often lucrative calling and there often wasn't much choice in religion, I suspect many of them weren't uniquely evil, just deceived, badly so, and to their own peril.

It raises an interesting question. Just as Jesus spent much of his time criticizing the most religious people of his day, ie the Pharisees, similarly the priests of Ba'al were in many ways the religious folk of their day. They sacrificed to their god, engaged in rituals and built their lives around a religion, some of them very sincerely so. Then of course, it turned out to be a lie.

So perhaps, instead of a victory lap where Elijah defeats the bad guys and high-fives everyone afterwards, it might be useful to see this as a cautionary tale also. A warning to examine ourselves and to not be deceived, to our own peril.

**What do you think about Elijah's decision to kill the priests of Ba'al, are you okay with it, uncomfortable, do you disagree?**

**The Bible is our ultimate barometer for truth, but how can we, on a practical day to day basis, examine our own beliefs to ensure that we are following the real God and not a false Ba'al?**

**Why do you think the people were willing to change their view after witnessing the miracle, while the priests of Ba'al stubbornly didn't and seemed to be trying to slink off? Why do you think the two groups reacted so differently? Are there any lessons we ourselves need to learn from their stubbornness?**

# Rain

*Read 1 Kings 18:41-46*

It's interesting that, at this one moment, Elijah probably could have overthrown King Ahab if he'd wanted. After what they'd just seen, it's doubtful anyone would have objected. With the weight of the crowd on his side, Ahab wouldn't have stood a chance. But Elijah chooses not to, and God doesn't seem to tell him to do so. It's worth noting that, while Ba'alism did continue in Israel after this, Ahab doesn't seem to substantially interfere with Elijah's future attempts to organize the prophets of the Lord. Even despite Ahab's antagonistic relationship with Elijah and the prophets of God in general, the existential threat to the worship of God passes.

And so, in this moment of stunning triumph, Elijah completes his journey and finally lifts the curse from the land with a prayer.

As a minor aside, the Hebrew word here translated as servant, really just means a young boy. Since I couldn't find any previous evidence of him having a servant before this, I had Elijah's nephew fill the role in the book.

**How does Elijah's simple prayer to bring back the rain contrast with the priests of Ba'al and their elaborate rituals?**

**We are told later that there are still a few godly people in Israel who suffered during all this, and certainly some of them must have sincerely prayed for God to bring back the rain so they didn't starve. Why do you think only Elijah could pray and bring back the rain and not anyone else?**

**Many numbers in the Bible have a certain significance. Do you think there is any significance to Elijah's helper having to check seven times for rain?**

# The Empress Strikes Back

**As usual, I'd encourage you to read all of 1 Kings 19 in a single go before continuing.**

*Read 1 Kings 19:1-3*

The rain returns and life heats up in Jezreel. Given that just prior to this Elijah and Ahab seem to have grudgingly decided not to try and kill each other, it's unusual that Jezebel would be out for his head. Likely she undertook her little murder adventure on her own, hoping to present it as a *fait accompli* to Ahab. This would also explain why, afterwards, Elijah suddenly isn't in danger, as Ahab likely figured out what was going on and put a stop to it before Elijah could call down more fire and disintegrate his palace.

It's honestly a little puzzling that Jezebel sent Elijah a message beforehand. It feels a bit extreme for just an empty threat and warning him ahead of killing him serves little purpose. My personal view is that the message was more of an ancient equivalent of an arrest warrant, and either the messenger or some soldiers right behind him were tasked with carrying it out. This might explain a bit better why Elijah ran for his life. He was in extremely imminent danger.

All that said though, there's likely a little more going on here. Given everything that just happened and his obvious courage, saying Elijah simply got scared and ran isn't a very satisfying explanation. In the book I suggested a far more insidious problem. There, the message is delivered to him in front of a crowd of people congratulating him about his success on Mount Carmel. And yet, when the ultimatum is thrown down, nobody springs to his aid. There's not a crowd to fight with him against the evil of Ba'al this time

Elijah discovers that, even after everything he's proved, there's still no one brave enough to stand at his side when it really matters. He's still alone. We'll explore this more in the next section.

**Have you ever been betrayed by people close to you? People that you thought had your back?**

**Have you ever felt soul-crushingly alone? What were the circumstances?**

**I move a lot for my work and so I visit a lot of churches. At a surprising number I've been politely greeted at the door then walked inside only to discover no one will take the initiative to even talk to me. Have you ever had a similar experience? Why do you think so many churches are like this and what can you personally do to help remedy it?**

## **Alone**

*Read 1 Kings 19:3-5*

So why say that Elijah felt alone? Well, put yourself in his shoes for a moment, he'd just worked three and a half years for a single goal, prove that Ba'al was a false God and rescue Israel. And now at the very moment of his triumph, he finds that Jezebel still wants him dead, and his great victory hasn't solved any of the real problems. Things haven't changed, certainly not as much as they should have. Jezebel, the chief proponent of Ba'alism in Israel, is still alive and hates him more than ever. Clearly no one is going to protect him or he wouldn't have had to run for his life, and despite everything, the goal he's been fighting towards for years hasn't panned out. Instead he's back where he started, alone and on the run.

Beersheba is at the southern end of Judah, in what we would now call the Negev Desert. It's about as far from Israel as Elijah could get while staying in quasi-friendly territory. A day's journey into the desert is another ten to twenty miles past that, basically out into the wasteland. Elijah headed to the ancient equivalent of the middle of nowhere.

Elijah's claim that he is no better than his father's hearkens back to other giants in Jewish history, Moses, Joshua, and David, people who had tried to save Israel before, and who, given the situation, clearly had not succeeded in the long run.

And so Elijah finds himself, alone, frustrated and disappointed.

**Do you think Elijah was just disappointed, or do you think another emotion was at play? If so what?**

**Elijah felt like he had failed, but by destroying the priests of Ba'al, he had seriously weakened Ba'alism in Israel. Many people would regard that as a success. How can grief and frustration cloud your perception of things? Can you share a situation that seemed worse than it really was when you were in it?**

**Elijah leaves his helper in Beersheba, have you ever isolated yourself when you were upset?**

## **Abandoned**

If you accept that Elijah was disappointed with how things had turned out, there's one glaring problem. He shouldn't have been.

As far as we know, God never made Elijah any promises. So why was he upset?

In a way the answer is obvious. He felt that the project he'd worked for and sunk his life into had failed. Not just failed, but someone was trying to murder him over it. But the obvious counterpoint is that death was how things had turned out for most of his contemporaries. Prophets in Israel didn't have a great survival rate. Frankly, he'd beat the odds just staying alive until now.

The dilemma of unmet expectations seems to crop up everywhere, relationships, work, religion... everything. I doubt that when Elijah had first called down the curse upon Israel all those years ago, he'd had any clue the amazing journey he would go on. And while I can't say what his expectations were, I doubt they were anything close to what had happened. In the book I posit that he hadn't had many expectations at all when he started. And yet now he does?

Speaking from personal experience, it's very difficult to work on a project for years, let alone three and a half years, and not have some expectations by the end. Even if you started out with none, they show up in the little moments, the small triumphs along the way. The points where you start to get excited about what's happening.

And most of us can also speak to the frustration and heartbreak when those expectations are shattered. It can hurt a lot, and it can poison your relationships if you allow it.

When I first published the Days of Elijah, the book sold a couple copies the first few days then... nothing. It scared me. I'd worked really hard putting it together and it stung to see if not succeeding despite all my research and best efforts. I was really upset and

got very angry with God. It felt like I'd done all this work, and yet God wasn't doing his part in making the book a success, like I'd been tricked into working my butt off and then been left out on my own. That example is easier to talk about because it turned around in the end and the book slowly began to sell more copies. But even as I write this, I have another book that's failing and has been for some time, despite my efforts. And of course, there are other things in my own life, desires it hurts to even think about because my prayers haven't been answered. Things that were never promised, but that I grew to expect.

**What sort of expectations do you think Elijah had when he began his ministry? What about at this point?**

**What sort of unmet expectations do you have in your life?**

**How do you think we end up with these expectations about life and others? Where do they come from?**

## The Messenger

*Read 1 Kings 19:5-8*

The word here translated as *angel* really means messenger. Some people view the phrase *Angel of the Lord* in the Old Testament, as referring to what's called a theophany, or a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus. While I don't completely disagree with this view in other instances, I personally feel that it is unwarranted in this case. The main reason being that, after Elijah leaves, he goes off to Mount Horeb (an alternate name for Mount Sinai) and goes to speak with God. The angel seems to be helping him along this journey, but if the angel was already a manifestation of Jesus then there's really no point to the journey.

Regardless, the journey to Mount Horeb is particularly fascinating. People have long debated the actual location of the mountain. The current mountain known as Mount Sinai was actually identified by Saint Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great in the 300's AD. Others have suggested that the true location is a place called Jabal al-Lawz, a peak located in modern Saudi Arabia. In either case, it was a very long walk, and this marks the second time Elijah seems to have completed a miraculous feat of endurance, the first being his running ahead of Ahab's chariot.

**Has God ever empowered you to keep going past your own limits, whether physically, or in some other way?**

**Elijah is running away from Queen Jezebel, but God sends an angel to him, apparently with other plans. Have you seen God use your own weaknesses and failures for his purposes?**

**Despite not being particularly relevant to modern people, the Mount Sinai vs Jabal al-Lawz debate is actually very contentious in some rarified circles. Can you think of similarly arcane debates that are hotly argued in Christian circles, while perhaps not really mattering in the grand scheme of things? Why do you think people like to argue about these sorts of topics?**

## **The Still Small Voice**

*Read 1 Kings 19:9-14*

There have been a lot of sermons preached on the still small voice mentioned here. Most of them have probably analyzed it far better than I can. I won't say much, except to point out two things. Firstly, up until now God is directly documented as speaking to Elijah three times, four if you are of the view that God speaks to him before 1 Kings 17:1. In the book, *The Days of Elijah*, I suggested that previously God had spoken to him out of a windstorm, an earthquake and a fire. This is speculation, but if it was true it would lend additional significance to the manifestations of God's power seen here.

Secondly, it's fascinating to note that Elijah gives the same answer to God both times. Like he doesn't understand the question. To be honest, when writing the book, I struggled with the question also. What was he doing there? God had clearly provided a miraculous way for Elijah to come to Mount Horeb, and yet he shows up and we aren't left with a particularly clear answer as to why God brought him all the way out there.

**What do you think God's question meant?**

Elijah doesn't fully tell the truth, when he says he is the only one of the Lord's prophets left. He knows there must have been others because Obadiah just mentioned saving a great number of them a few weeks before. But in his own mind, he seems to feel like the only one left. Do you ever find yourself repeating lies about yourself, even when speaking with God?

Why do you think Elijah gave the same answer twice? How do you think not understanding what God meant affected him?

## New Kings

*Read 1 Kings 19:15-18*

I think this is the most poorly understood part of the story of Elijah. When writing the book, I found this was one place in the story where the commentaries proved almost universally unhelpful.

Take this Example from Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible:

*Anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; it is nowhere related that Elijah did go to Damascus, and anoint Hazael, though it may be he did; however he acquainted Elisha with it, and he declared it to Hazael, that he should be king of Syria, and which perhaps is all that is meant by anointing; that is, that he should be made king, and which was declared by both these prophets.*

Personally, I think this is wrong. People seem to jump through a lot of hoops explaining how, through Elisha's ministry years afterward, Elijah did fulfill God's commandments. But all this ignores a straightforward reading of the text.

Elijah **didn't** do what God said.

And it also helps explain why the mention of Elisha killing people, never seems to actually happen, why those seven thousand God had reserved for himself never show back up again. God had something planned, some other way of purging Israel, but he left it up to Elijah to choose to initiate it or not, and Elijah chose not to.

Now, that's not to say God's words didn't eventually find fulfillment, but it was much later, after whatever moment of opportunity Elijah had possessed here had long passed. Hazael would become king and devastate Israel, and Jehu would eventually destroy the house of Ahab, as well as killing the prophets of Ba'al. But Israel's long slide towards idolatry would only be slowed, not stopped.

It's an interesting thought experiment, to imagine what might have happened if Elijah had acted immediately. How the world might have been different. Unfortunately, we'll never know.

**Have you ever experienced a command from God that you didn't understand or didn't want to complete?**

**What do you think might have happened if Elijah had immediately carried out God's commands?**

**Set against the entirety of Israel, seven thousand people was a small number. When the King of Assyria conquered Samaria a hundred and fifty years later, he mentioned carrying off 27,000 captives from just that city alone. Do you ever feel like you're alone in your beliefs amidst everyone else?**

## Elisha

*Read 1 Kings 19:19-21*

The one part of God's command that Elijah does immediately go and complete is finding Elisha. Elisha likely recognized him as the man who had just called down fire from heaven a couple months before. Elijah seems hesitant to choose Elisha though, throwing his cloak over him and walking away, instead of anointing him in the traditional fashion. Perhaps he intended to offer Elisha the chance to refuse the mantle. Regardless, Elisha doesn't. If anything, he seems ready to follow the prophet, simply wanting to say goodbye to his parents. He's also willing to slaughter and cook his oxen, his means of plowing the soil and growing food.

It's unclear if Elisha's family owned all twelve yoke of oxen. If so, they possessed considerable wealth. Alternatively, farmers might have plowed their different fields as a

group, moving from one field to the next. In that case, Elisha being at the back might have been at the lowest position, literally, eating everyone else's dust.

In either case, it's fair to read Elijah's words, *What have I done to you?* As surprise at Elisha's eagerness.

**What is your view, do you think Elisha came from a wealthy family or a poor one?**

**Why do you think Elisha was so eager to follow Elijah?**

**In the modern world, communications technology allows people to be close, even from the other side of the world. But in Elijah's day, it's likely Elisha didn't know when he would see his parents again. Has God ever asked you to step away from people you know to follow him?**

## The Warrior King

*Read 1 Kings 20:1-43*

Chapter 20 doesn't directly pertain to Elijah, but it's useful background information. The wars between Israel and Aram-Damascus were fairly frequent. Aram was a powerful city-state situated to the northeast of Israel. They were seemingly powerful enough to hold off the encroaching Assyrian Empire for a number of years, before Damascus was finally reduced and conquered by the rising might of Assyria in the 730's BC.

During the mid-800's BC though they were strong enough to raise a huge army and siege Samaria. Ahab's willingness to surrender his own children as hostages attests to the dire situation, and he only really balks when Ben-Hadad insists on sending in his people (ie occupying and looting Samaria).

The name Ben-Hadad, literally means *son of the god Hadad*, another fellow deity of Ba'al in the Mesopotamian pantheon. This may partly explain why God handed him over to Ahab in two great battles.

Ahab's decision to make peace with Ben-Hadad may seem strange given that Ben-Hadad was just trying to conquer his kingdom, but there were many benefits. Firstly, the ability to trade in Damascus without tariffs would be extremely lucrative. Secondly, Ahab was likely concerned about the rising strength of Assyria to the north. Making an ally of

Ben-Hadad would allow them to unite and fight Assyria at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BC.

The results of the battle are unknown, as our main source is the Assyrian's under King Shalmaneser, who generally lied about suffering any defeats. The fact that everyone opposing him remained in power suggests that he was turned back, and Israel was saved.

For now.

**King Ahab witnessed two miraculous victories over Aram. His situation went from disaster to victory. Has God ever led you from disaster to victory?**

**It seems that for a little while King Ahab did trust God, or at least the prophet He sent, enough to move out and fight against Aram, even when badly outnumbered. What do you think precipitated this change? Was it desperation, some small amount of faith, or something else?**

**Ahab possibly kept Ben-Hadad alive as an ally, not realizing that God had already decreed Hazael as the new King of Aram. Have you ever found your own wisdom and plans confounded by God's plans?**

# A Legal Affair

*Read 1 Kings 21:1-16*

Under the Levitical law, no one in Israel was supposed to permanently sell their land. Originally, God laid out that all sales of land were temporary. At the end of each fifty-year period there would be a Jubilee year in which all land would revert back to its historic ownership. In this time period, land and agriculture were the basis of most people's wealth, so ensuring equitable land ownership ensured some basis of equality was maintained in society. That said, this rule regarding the reversion of land to historic owners doesn't seem to have ever been observed, or if it was, we have no records. Still, Naboth cites it as a reason not to sell his land, and he dies for his refusal.

In a way this episode typifies much of Ahab's reign. A modern court wouldn't directly hold Ahab accountable for Naboth's death, and yet through his moping and unwillingness to restrain his wife, Ahab's actions brought about the man's death, whether he intended it or not.

**Our actions sometimes speak louder than words. Have your actions ever sent a message you didn't intend? Has this ever hurt someone?**

**Ahab clearly blew Naboth's refusal entirely out of proportion, and his actions seem very petty and petulant. Do we sometimes fall into the same trap about petty things? How and why?**

**Ahab could reasonably guess that Jezebel had some hand in Naboth's death. It comes across as her very twisted way of loving him. And yet, he doesn't seem very concerned that his wife just had someone murdered for a plot of land. Do we sometimes ignore the cost to others, so long as something benefits us? If so, what are some examples?**

# Deus Vult

*Read 1 Kings 21:17-26*

There should be something very obvious that jumps out at you when you read these verses. Read vs 17-19 then read verses 20-24. I would argue that Elijah doesn't say what God told him to say... at all.

I used to read this and simply think that Elijah was paraphrasing... which, maybe he is. But in a straight reading of the text, it seems like Elijah badly distorts the Lord's message.

That's a big deal. As a prophet of the Lord, Elijah's whole job is to convey God's words accurately to others. Throughout the entire story he seems to improvise a little, but it's always in the spirit of what God intended, and God repeatedly backs him up.

Here it reads like Elijah just got angry. Which is understandable. In the book, it's suggested that perhaps Elijah and Naboth were friends in some way. That would explain how Naboth knew the Levitical Law concerning property, and why he was willing to make a very bold stand on his principals.

Before writing the book, this whole episode always felt strange. Why was it included at all? In the saga of the story of Israel it feels very inconsequential. Yes, Elijah prophesizes Ahab's death, but beyond that it always felt isolated, disconnected from the rest of Elijah's story.

And maybe it is, events did happen as Elijah said they would, so maybe it was solely included because of that. But when writing the book, I've become convinced this episode is part of a larger saga. Because here, for once, Elijah fails at his job. He doesn't convey the word of God accurately. And because of that, things don't happen the way Elijah intends. But we'll get to that later

**I've taken an abnormal view on the above verses and Elijah's role in them. What are your thoughts? Do you disagree? Agree? Not sure?**

**Have you ever failed to convey the word of God to someone? What happened?**

One counterpoint to my argument above, is that events did happen the way Elijah said, Jezebel was eaten by dogs, ect. This poses a fascinating question, did these things happen because Elijah was a prophet, and one of the requirements for being a prophet is that a prophet's words have to come true? Or did God intend him to say that all along? In The Days of Elijah, the prophet asks a similar question, is he a prophet because he speaks the Word of the Lord, or does he speak the Word of the Lord because he is a prophet?

(Note: This is a very abstract, almost chicken and egg sort of question, so don't get too bogged down.)

## Humility

*Read 1 Kings 21:27-29*

As I mentioned before, Elijah's harsh words seem to have had a serious impact on Ahab, who has spent a substantial part of his life dealing with the prophets of God. Elijah doesn't seem to have meant for Ahab to repent, but he does, and so God tells Elijah that he will forestall the judgement until the days of Ahab's children.

My personal view is that this happens because Elijah's prophecy was far more extreme, enough to terrify Ahab into repentance. Had he stuck to the original sentence Ahab, might not have repented. Again, this isn't a particularly mainstream view, so I'll leave it to you to decide if I'm right.

**Ahab's repentance seems to be genuine, and in many ways Ahab's whole life seems to bounce between grudging acceptance that God is real, and worshiping Ba'al and Asherah. Why do you think Ahab experiences these changes in his beliefs and attitudes over the years?**

**Elijah was clearly angry at Ahab. What effect do you think hearing that God would suspend the sentence for a time had on Elijah?**

**Throughout the Old Testament, God frequently grants a reprieve to people who turn to him in humility. Why do you think that is?**

## The End of an Era

*Read 1 Kings 22:1-53*

Following the Battle of Qarqar, Ahab seems to have been flushed with potentially three major victories. This is in an era where most warfare was low grade raiding and kings might reasonably only fight one pitched battle in their entire lifetime. Ahab has three under his belt, including some truly impossible victories. Now he rolls the dice for a fourth.

This time his luck runs out. Micah's description of the heavenly court is particularly fascinating, as we see prophecy in the act of being carried out.

It's worth noting that Ahab is perfectly happy with his false prophets, and only King Jehoshaphat of Judah brings any light to the situation, by asking for a prophet of the Lord. The mention of horns goring the Arameans is likely a reference to Ba'al who was sometimes associated with a bull. Jehoshaphat seems very able to tell the false prophets apart from the prophets of the Lord.

In the end, Ahab tries to circumvent God's judgement and ends up dying anyway, thus fulfilling the words of Elijah.

**Are there any situations or people in your life who need a Jehoshaphat to shed true light on their situation? How can you practically do that?**

**Have you ever allowed the success given to you by God to go to your head, and make you think that you can do things alone?**

**Ahab ends up making a bad decision based off bad advice. Have you surrounded yourself with people who help you make good decisions or bad ones?**

## Harsh Words

**As usual I'd encourage you to read all of 2 Kings 1 in a single go before continuing.**

*Read 2 Kings 1:1-8*

Remember when we discussed a few sections back how Elijah seemed to fail at accurately conveying the Word of God to Ahab. Well, this chapter here actually forms the second part of that thesis. The reason is very simple, this is one of the few places where the same message from God is repeated three times in a row. Once to Elijah, again by the king's messengers, and a final time later on in the chapter. All three times it is repeated pretty much verbatim. In my view, this is an indication that Elijah recognized his own mistake. He was being far more careful this time with how he handled the word of God.

On a completely different note, Ba'al-Zebub is an excellent example of how ancient religions seemed to function. Ba'al Zebub was both Ba'al in the general sense, but also very specifically the local god of Ekron, one of the Philistine cities along Israel's coast. It's unclear why Ahaziah would send a message to another kingdom asking for answers. Possibly he wanted an unbiased opinion, recalling the lying prophets who had predicted his father's victory two years earlier. From his later behavior, it seems likely he desired positive news, and perhaps the priests of Ba'al-Zebub had a reputation for accurate and positive predictions. As mentioned earlier, when talking about the Oracle of Delphi, some religious sites had a reputation for being more reliable than others. Perhaps also, he didn't want to ask the prophets of the Lord, who as Ahab had noted before his own death, never prophesied anything good about him.

**It can be tempting to avoid God when we don't necessarily want to hear his answer. Have you ever been afraid to ask God something because you didn't want to hear what He would say?**

**Ba'al Zebub isn't commonly worshipped today, but people still seek answers to questions beyond our control. Can you think of any modern examples that fill the role of Ba'al as a way of seeking false reassurance in modern society?**

**Ahaziah isn't highly regarded by the author of Kings, but here his specific sin seems to be asking Ba'al for guidance instead of the Lord. What lessons can we take from this for our own walk with God?**

## The Angel of the Lord

*Read 2 Kings 1:9-18*

I never used to understand this scene, and that's partly because there's a lot that's not explained. Let's go through it piece by piece.

First, when people want me dead, I generally try to avoid them. So why does Ahaziah even want Elijah brought to him at all? The best answer is that he wanted to *persuade* Elijah to change his prophecy. Likely at sword point. This sort of 'shoot the messenger' logic may seem a bit strange to us today, but that's mostly because an average person today wouldn't think Elijah's words had any special power. But Ahaziah knows better, he saw what Elijah did to the kingdom firsthand, and in desperation he tries to get Elijah to change his prophecy.

Second, why does he send fifty men. That's a lot for just Elijah and Elisha. Plus, Moab is currently revolting. It's doubtful Ahaziah has men to spare, let alone three platoon's worth. So, what's going on? The whole situation reeks of desperation, which reinforces the above point about trying to get Elijah to change his prophecy.

But why fifty men? Why not five? Maybe ten?

Well, in verse three the Angel of the Lord gives Elijah a message. Then over in verse 15, the angel tells Elijah to follow the third captain. He's been chilling there next to Elijah the whole time. That might explain why the king felt he needed fifty soldiers. He wasn't just going after two men. They had a guardian of their own.

This also explains why the messengers came back at all. They didn't know who Elijah was. As far as they were concerned, a random guy met them on the road and told them to go back to the king. And they obeyed?

That's how you get fired, or worse. So why did they turn around? Maybe because there was someone else blocking their way. Someone substantially more scary than two prophets.

And then we get to another strange part, the fires of heaven. One person mentioned to me that when reading this scene, it felt like Elijah was being very vindictive and disintegrating people until someone begs him to stop.

But in the context of everything else happening, that's not what's occurring at all. The king intends to force Elijah to change his prophecy, but Elijah has an angel guarding him, so he sends a platoon to take Elijah anyway. They demand Elijah basically surrender himself in the name of the king, and Elijah more or less defends himself. The last captain, sees what's going on, takes a more respectfully approach, and knowing that Elijah will be safe, the angel tells him to go. Elijah goes, delivers the message just as God told him, and leaves, unscathed.

**Have you ever felt like God has granted you a special protection, either for a specific task, or maybe just a period in your life?**

**Elijah faced intense pressure to change his message from the king. Do you struggle with pressures to change your message? If so, how do you cope with it?**

**King Ahaziah's forces were formidable, but no match for the power of God. Have you ever witnessed God demonstrate his power over earthly forces and kingdoms?**

## The Long Goodbye

*Read 1 Kings 2:1-18*

Elijah's leaving seems to be something of an open secret. Elijah knows. Elisha knows. A bunch of other prophets know. Everybody seems to know, but nobody wants to talk about it. It's never specified why exactly God decided to take Elijah up into heaven. He is mentioned as being brought back in the form of John the Baptist, and it's speculated that he might literally be one of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. But at the end of the day, we don't know why exactly. Perhaps it was simply Elijah's time. Certainly, his ascent into heaven solidified him as having lived a truly unique life.

There's a certain symbolism in Elijah's path. He began his ministry coming from Tishbe and crossing the Jordan river over into Israel, now he ends it, crossing back, not far from the place where Moses and Joshua would have stood five hundred years before. And just like then, the river parts at his command.

Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit isn't a request to do twice as many miracles as Elijah. Rather it's a request to step into Elijah's leadership role and ministry,

the double portion being the inheritance of the firstborn. In a way Elijah seems to assent but leaves the issue in God's hands, as to whether or not Elisha will see him leave.

Similarly, Elisha's shout that he sees the chariots and horsemen of Israel, is him claiming this promise as his master is taken from him.

**Much of this chapter involves Elisha saying goodbye to Elijah without directly acknowledging what is happening. Why do you think he was hesitant to talk about Elijah being taken?**

**Elisha finally received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, partly through his persistence following Elijah even when Elijah tried to dissuade him. What can we learn from this for our own walk with God?**

**Elisha calls Elijah his father when Elijah is finally taken. How did Elijah's mentorship shape his life? How have mentors shaped your own life?**

## The Sons of the Prophets

There's one last thing to talk about, Elijah's immediate legacy. Following Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel, you may have noticed that several other prophets have started to enter the story. Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 and an unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 20. Plus a whole bunch of them at the end of Elijah's time on Earth. Who were these people? And where did they come from?

Well, throughout Elisha's ministry there are several mentions of the *Sons of the Prophets* or *Company of the Prophets*. Not much is said about them, but given Elijah's prominence and the time of their appearance, they seem to be a group, possibly a school, that gathered around him following the events on Mount Carmel. Undoubtedly, some returned from having fled to Judah to escape persecution, while others were likely trained up as a new generation of prophets.

Although we know very few of their names, they seemed to have played an important role in preserving the worship and knowledge of God in Israel and Judah. Elisha had one of them anoint Jehu as king, who would go on to stamp out Ba'al worship in Israel for at least a generation. There's some speculation that later generations of prophets

may have fled Israel during the Assyrian invasions, bringing with them various scriptures to Judah to the south.

Regardless, amid the fiery saga that most people associate with Elijah's life, it's easy to forget the people he influenced. People who followed God and taught others to follow God because of him. A legacy that perhaps is felt even today.

**How can we leave our own legacy by impacting others?**

**By that standard, are you leaving a good legacy or a bad one?**

**It's never said that Elijah went looking for followers, rather that they gathered around him as he continued to follow the Lord. How can you practically live a life where people follow you?**

## The Critics

Now that we've come to the end of Elijah's saga, I wanted to briefly address one other point. If you read much secular scholarship on the Bible, you'll encounter an interesting position. A lot of people are of the view that miracles in the Bible in general, and by extension those that Elijah performed never really happened.

This view holds that the Old Testament as we know it, was composed sometime around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Most likely during the Babylonian exile. There is textual evidence that some books were assembled at a fairly late date, Chronicles being an obvious example. The author of Chronicles makes frequent references to situations that continue until his day, which must logically be after the Babylonian exile given that's where the book ends. Psalms also incorporates some psalms that clearly post-date the destruction of Jerusalem, and Lamentations is quite literally *about* the destruction of Jerusalem.

However, there's a substantial difference in saying someone compiled a final product in the 5<sup>th</sup> century from earlier sources, which are often referenced in both Kings and Chronicles, as opposed to saying the stories were made up out of whole cloth.

I think a lot of the real objection to reading Elijah's story as history is the underlying assumption that miracles don't happen and thus any reference to them must be fake. You see a similar view in regards to the Gospels and Jesus's miracles, as well as the

Book of Acts. Parts of Acts are regarded as excellent geographical and historical information. In Acts Paul walks into cities that really existed and traveled in ways that people at the time would have traveled, but the moment he starts doing impossible things, that all goes right out the window and it's clearly made up.

So why am I bringing this up. Well, because I think in a lot of ways Elijah answers this objection. Simply put, if you take the God out of Elijah's life, he doesn't survive. Elijah was a man fighting a king that we know historically existed, and everything about his journey was a miracle.

He should have died when he told Ahab of the drought. He definitely should have died when he fled to the Cherith Ravine alone. A starving widow in Zarephath never should have taken him in, let alone been able to feed him for several years. He should have had no chance against hundreds of priests of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. He should have died out alone in the desert when he fled from Jezebel, and he certainly shouldn't have been able to hold back the forces of Ahaziah, coming to make him recant his prophecy.

If there's no God in Elijah's story, then there was no Elijah. There's no world where Elijah scrapes by without miracles, they're integral to the story. You can't separate the man and the miracles the way some people might want to. You can't say he was just a guy whose exploits were later elaborated on. Because if that was true... he wouldn't have survived long enough to have any exploits.

You also can't really say some scholar just inserted a bunch of unrelated stories about Elijah, because I don't think they actually are unrelated. My takeaway when writing the Days of Elijah was that his story forms a cohesive whole. It's not a bunch of pieces, it's his journey and challenges and failures across a lifetime of following God through some very difficult situations.

Elijah is the man whose life is special because it's so bound up in God. You can't really separate them. And that's kind of the beauty in Elijah's story. He was a man who threaded the needle of life with some very serious divine help.

# Conclusion

## The Prophet of the Lord

So, we've made it to the end. We've walked through the story of a fascinating man of God and explored the challenges and choices he faced along the way. I apologize if I've been a bit long winded, but my hope is that you've taken away something from this story to help in your own life. And that perhaps Elijah's story isn't just something we read through, but something that can still impact us today.

When I began writing the Days of Elijah, I started from the view that Elijah wasn't special, that he was just a person like anyone else. And yet, in his own way, he was special. He did things I can't imagine myself doing, all while walking a truly amazing path. He struggled with challenges and questions we face today, and faced them in his own way, perhaps not always successfully. He also persevered, even through his struggles and setbacks.

God's path for Elijah wasn't the one I might have picked if I was writing the story. He never got rich, never really seemed to have prospered, it feels unlikely he was ever married, and in the end, he didn't save Israel. Within several generations Israel was slipping yet again, and less than two hundred years after his time, the nation would enter a terminal decline and be brutally conquered by Assyria. Even in Elijah's own day, there were moments where he felt like a failure, moments of doubt, and despair, times when he didn't understand God, times when he had to be brave, and hope, and believe and pray.

And yet even though Israel would fall, Elijah did make a difference. He made a difference for Elisha, for the Sidonian woman who got to smile at her son every morning, for everyone who saw him on Mount Carmel, for the Prophets of the Lord who were no longer persecuted. His story has rippled across nearly three thousand years, to the time of Jesus and even today. Elijah is the proof that it doesn't take an army to matter. Just one person willing to follow and trust God.

It also shows God's true power, that he can take an ordinary person who has faith and make them into someone truly extraordinary. That He does have a plan, and it can be the most incredible journey. And that sometimes that plan takes you places you never would have imagined.

To be honest, sometimes I'm a little disappointed, because that road of faith isn't always the easiest path. There are times when I wonder what's going on. Why I am where I am. Why certain things are happening. Times when I don't have any answers. Moments where nothing makes sense. Times where life is lonely. Times where I don't see miracles.

But it's comforting to know that even people like Elijah struggled and were afraid sometimes too. Everyone has their moments of doubt. But along with those moments of fear and doubt and regret, there are other moments, moments of victory. Moments where we pray and believe and turn the sky to bronze. And Elijah reminds us of that. He reminds us that it doesn't take someone special, but rather that God makes people special. Faith is something that everyone can have, and Elijah shows us what God can do with that faith.

And so, even in the darkness, perhaps we can all take courage. God may not use any of us in exactly the same way as Elijah, but we can know that we aren't ever that different from the prophet either. That the God of Elijah, the God who resurrected a widow's son, who sent fire from heaven, who commanded angels and provided a jar of flour and a jug of oil that never ran empty, is our God too. And he does care. And no matter what the world may look like, we are not alone.

**What part of Elijah's story resonated the most with you, and what have you learned about him that you find most interesting?**

**Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share on Elijah?**

**THE END**