

Bible Stories

ELIJAH

1 Kings 18:20-21

February 11, 2023

The bible tells us Elijah was from the town of Tishbe, but we don't anything about his background or who his parents were.

His name means, "**Yahweh is my God,**" and he certainly lived up to his name, standing in sharp contrast against the idolatry of the day. His primary prophetic mission was to awaken the nation of Israel to the truth that Yahweh alone is God.

I have broken Elijah's story into 8 vignettes:

- By the Brook Cherith
- The Widow of Zarephath
- Mt. Carmel Showdown
- Just kill me now
- Replacement
- Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard – covered in the story of Ahab
- Encounter with King Ahaziah
- Heaven-bound

By the Brook Cherith – 1 Kings 17:1-7

The first time we hear from Elijah he is telling King Ahab that the true God was about to send a famine on the land - there would be no rain in Israel – which was a direct challenge to Baal, the storm and fertility god Ahab worshipped.

After delivering his message, Yahweh instructed Elijah to get out of town and go to the Brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan, "**You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.**"

Elijah spent some time by the brook. Twice a day the ravens brought him bread and meat, but after a while the brook dried up, so, Yahweh told Elijah to go to the town of Zarephath – which was in Phoenicia on the coast, 13 miles north of Tyre – there a widow would care for him.

The Widow of Zarephath – 1 Kings 17:8-24

Elijah did as Yahweh told him, walking the 100 +/- miles from Cherith to Zarephath. When he got to the gates of the city, he saw a widow gathering sticks. He asked her for a glass of water and some food.

At first, she declined, telling Elijah that even now she was gathering sticks to make a final meal for herself and her son – after that she expected only death.

Elijah: *Listen, I know you're afraid, but don't be. Trust me when I ask you to make me a small loaf before you make one for yourself and your son. Yahweh has told me your flour and oil will not run out until it rains again.*

The woman did as Elijah instructed and Scripture says that there was food every day for Elijah and the woman and her family.

Sometime later, the widow's son became ill and died. Understandably devastated, she turned on Elijah, "**What did I ever do to you, man of God, that you would come to remind me of my sins and kill my son?**"

Elijah: *Give me your son.*

Elijah took the boy, carried him to the upper room and laid him on the bed. He cried to Yahweh, "**O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy upon this widow by causing her son to die?**" Then stretched himself out on the boy 3 times.

Yahweh listened to the cry of Elijah and the boy lived. Elijah picked up the child and took him to his mother....

Mt. Carmel Showdown – 1 Kings 18

The time had come.... Yahweh instructed Elijah to return to Israel – Ahab went out to meet him.

Ahab: *Are you the one who has created all this trouble for Israel?*

Elijah: *It's not me, it's you, man. You and your family have ruined everything, so here's what we are going to do. We're going to go to the top of Mount Carmel. You are going to bring the people and all the prophets of Baal and Asherah with you and we're going to end this debate.*

Ahab sent out a message and all of Israel came to the top of Mount Carmel. Elijah looked out over the crowd.....

Elijah: *How long are you going to be stuck between 2 opinions. Either Yahweh is God and you choose to follow Him, or Baal is god and you choose to follow him. You can't have it both ways!*

The people said **NOTHING**, so Elijah continued.

Elijah: *I'm here and all Baal's prophets are here, so this is what we are going to do. Baal's guys are going to take an oxen and prepare it for sacrifice. They are going to put wood and the sacrifice on the altar **BUT** they are **NOT** going to set it on fire. They will call on the name of their god. I will do the same - only I will call on the name of Yahweh. Whichever God answers with fire from heaven – HE IS GOD!*

The people said, "**Great Idea**"

The prophets of Baal prepared their altar and began to dance around it calling on Baal, "**Oh Baal, answer us!**" They did this all morning, but there was no answer. Elijah was over in the corner watching.....

Elijah: *Hey! Nothing is happening! Maybe Baal is on vacation or he's at the grocery store or he's taking a nap or has gone to the bathroom. Whatever he **IS** doing – he is **NOT** listening to **YOU!***

This made the prophets of Baal crazy and they began to cut themselves and cry out. They did this the rest of the day, but nothing happened!

Finally, it came time for the evening sacrifice – Elijah rebuilt the altar of God. He placed the wood and the oxen on the altar, then he did something strange. He dug a trench 3 feet wide and 3 feet deep all around the altar. Next, he told a couple of guys to get 4 pitchers of water and pour them over the altar. He had them do this 3 times until the water completely filled the trench.

Then, Elijah did another strange thing; he didn't dance, he didn't yell, he didn't cut himself – he simply knelt and turned his face toward heaven:

- **1 Kings 18:36-37** – O Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and that I have done all of these things by your words. Answer me, O Yahweh, answer me; that this people may know that you, O Yahweh, are God and that you have turned their hearts back again.

And fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and the stones of the altar and every drop of water in the trench! Then the people fell on their faces, "Yahweh -- he is God! Yahweh -- he is God!"

This "**battle**" will go down in history as one of the greatest Spiritual Showdowns of all time and will inform our understanding of the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:12-16 and 17:14-18.

Elijah ordered all the prophets of Baal and Asherah to be killed then he told his servant to go look toward the sea, but the servant didn't see anything. Elijah told him to do this 7 times. On the 7th trip, the servant saw a cloud the size of a man's hand coming from the sea.

Elijah: *Go tell Ahab to head on home because the rain is on its way.*

As the rain fell, Elijah ran all the way to Jezreel – approximately 22 miles – ahead of Ahab's chariot.

Once again Ahab was in a very bad mood. After telling Jezebel about his no good, very bad day, Jezebel popped a blood vessel, "**May my gods deal with me even more severely if by this time tomorrow Elijah isn't dead, Dead, DEAD!**"

Just kill me now – 1 Kings 19

Jezebel's declaration had a profound effect on Elijah. This prophet, who had just faced down the 850 priests of Baal and Asherah, **RAN!** He ran south all the way to Beersheba – 116 miles – and then journeyed another day into the wilderness. Exhausted, he fell under a juniper tree, but before falling asleep, he cried out to God, "**Yahweh, just kill me now!!**"

Suddenly he was startled awake when an Angel touched him and said, **"Get up and eat."** Elijah ate and fell asleep again.

The Angel came a 2nd time and repeated the command. Elijah ate and then **"went in the strength of that food, 40 days and nights to Horeb (Mt Sinai) the Mountain of God"** – approximately 250 miles away.

Yahweh: *Elijah, what are you doing here?*

Elijah: *I have been very zealous for You. The Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, broken down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*

Yahweh: *Go stand on the mountain. I'm going to pass by:*

- Strong wind – but Yahweh was not in the wind.
- Earthquake – but Yahweh was not in the earthquake.
- Fire – but Yahweh was not in the fire.
- A gentle whisper.

Yahweh: *Elijah, what are you doing here?*

Elijah: *I have been very zealous for You. The Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, broken down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*

Yahweh: *Go to Damascus and anointed Hazael king of Aram and anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king of Israel. Finally, anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah, as prophet in your place.*

- **1 Kings 19:18-19** - Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him. So, he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him.

Ahaziah – 2 Kings 1:1-16

Ahaziah was now king of Israel. He fell and was injured. Instead of consulting Yahweh, he consulted, the **"god of healing,"** Baal-Zebub.

Elijah: *Is there no God in Israel? Go tell the king he is not going to recover from his injuries. He will die.*

Ahaziah: *Bring him to me!*

After several unsuccessful attempts to bring Elijah in - the 1st two groups of soldiers were killed - Yahweh allowed Elijah to go to the king:

Elijah: *This is what Yahweh says, is it because there is no God in Israel that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!*

Elijah Goes to Heaven – 2 Kings 2:1-14

Before Elijah was taken to heaven, he traveled to Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho to say good-bye to the companies of prophets located in those towns. Elisha went with him.

At the Jordon River, 50 **"Sons of the Prophets"** watched as Elijah took off his mantle, rolled it up and struck the water. Immediately the water parted and Elijah and Elisha walked across the river on dry land. As they walked, Elijah turned to Elisha, **"What can I do for you?"**

Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, but Elijah was unsure of the request, so responded, **"If you see me taken up, your request has been granted. If not, your request has been denied."**

Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated them. As Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha saw him go and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more.

What do we do with this story?

Elijah was a mighty man of God. He stood like a stone wall against idolatry and he was not afraid to speak truth to power or tell the people what they needed to hear.

But the thing that moves me the most about his story is what happened after Mt Carmel.

Sometimes we are at our most vulnerable after we have had a mountain-top experience. After the adrenalin rush is over, we can experience exhaustion and depression. This is no doubt the case for Elijah and when he was told that Jezebel wanted him dead, he just broke – he'd had enough.

What is remarkable is not how Elijah responded to Jezebel, but how God responded to Elijah.

God did not beat Elijah about the head or question his commitment to the cause.

He let him sleep

He fed him

He gave him strength for the journey

He wasn't in the whirlwind or the fire or the earthquake. God whispered to a tired and fearful soldier and gave him something to do, ***“Go to Damascus and anointed Hazael king of Aram and anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king of Israel. Finally, anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah, as prophet in your place.”***

And in the end, He gave Elijah the ride of his life.