

## Elijah

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The topic I have been asked to speak on is concerning that well known Biblical character – Elijah. You probably know much about Elijah as recorded in the Scriptures so I don't want to just go through the story, but to bring some aspects out, which may be to the Lord's blessing I trust, and useful to us in our learning and practice in the Christian life.

One of the first things we realise when reading these accounts in the first book of Kings, is that almighty God uses the weak things of this earth to confound the mighty. We read Elijah was a Tishbite. Now there's not much known about the Tishbites, but we believe they were a rural tribal family living in a place called Tishba which was near Jabesh-gilead, which was on the east of Jordan, in the half tribe of Manasseh. Now Elijah wasn't a rich man at all. From descriptions we have of him we know he was a hairy man and wore rough clothing, he was really a very rural man. Yet he had a great zeal for God and was fervent in the spirit of God.

I think you've had a talk this morning on the fruits of the Spirit, and several of those were evident in Elijah. But the main thing with Elijah was that he was a chosen prophet of the Lord. He was God sent; he was not of his own self and not of his own will, it was through the power of the Spirit of God, and he walked with God as Noah and Moses did. Amazingly he had access to King Ahab, but he was not the type of person you would normally find before a king. Elijah was a man of great faith and obedient to the words and commands of God. Although a man of great faith, we also read he was a man of like passions such as we are. He was not super human. He was one of Adam's race just as we are, but he was chosen by God for the benefit of God's people. God's people at this time, being Israel who had solemnly left their obedience to the law of God. You probably realise years earlier at the time of Rehoboam and Solomon, Jeroboam had separated the ten tribes of Israel from Judah and Benjamin, and had made golden calves for their worship which he set up in Bethel and Dan.

At the time of Elijah, the king of Israel was Ahab who had married Jezebel of the Zidonians that worshipped Baal. Wives can have influence on husbands, can't they? She influenced Ahab so that he set up an altar to worship Baal. Many prophets of Baal were appointed by Jezebel and seemingly to the exclusion of the prophets of God.

Now God spoke to Elijah several words, and the first word to Elijah was one of prophecy. Ahab was in Samaria on the west side of Jordan, and Elijah was sent by God and told to show himself unto him. Elijah said *there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word*. Elijah was God's messenger, and although those words were spoken by Elijah, they were the words of God that God had told him to speak. We read in James' epistle that it was three and a half years before rain

came again.

Then came God's second word to Elijah – that he should go to the east side of Jordan to hide in the brook Cherith, there to receive the promise of God's care. Now Elijah again by faith, left and obeyed God with no questioning. However perhaps it's incidental that the brook Cherith flowed very close to Tishbi which was where Elisha came from, so it wasn't a strange place to him and perhaps he knew a good place there where he could hide. But as we read, God's promise was that he would be provided for by the ravens coming to him: *I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there*. Here we have another lesson. Where God's influence is upon them, everything obeys the word of God. It was God who caused all those animals to come to Noah into the ark. Noah didn't have to round them up, all he had to do was receive them into the ark as God brought them to him. And so God controls all of His creation, and especially those which we see as creatures around us. He feeds the birds, He clothes the grass, and so forth. How solemn that our own hearts are so disobedient to the word of God and we often fight against it. But on the influence of God, these ravens, these unclean beasts, fetched all that was needful for Elijah. So Elijah lived dependent upon God while he sat by the brook Cherith. So it is today, with those who walk humbly with God. We have that promise, *My God shall supply all your need*. It doesn't matter where it comes from, and it probably won't come from places where we would expect. But where the Lord's people have need, the Lord's goodness will find out a way. That is the case here with Elijah- he didn't decide himself how long he would stay in that place. He obeyed the word of God in the place that God had sent him, until God told him to move. The brook dried up as there had been no rain or dew, and the people of Israel in that area had drunk from it. The judgment of God was that all the water would dry up, and so that affected Elijah as well.

Then God spoke to Elijah the third time – he said go to Zarephath. Now Zarephath was in Lebanon of the Zidonians. It was the order to go north over the river Jordan, up through the plain of Jezreel and still to go northwards outside the land of Israel, to nearly 100 miles away. It was the land of, what we might say, Elijah's enemy, Jezebel. But Elijah obeyed again by faith, not doubting. He may have had many an inward fear as he had never been this way before. He needed much strength. He didn't have cars or transport like we have now to go those 100 miles, but where the Lord directs His people He will give them strength. Elijah behaved very differently from Jonah, didn't he? When Jonah was sent by the Lord outside of Israel to go to Nineveh of the Assyrians, it was not of his will and he sought to flee from God. Elijah, under the influence of the spirit of God, obeyed God completely and went up to Zarephath, which was also subject to the famine. And as we read, a widow woman, whom God sent to Elijah, would sustain him. She was just about to eat her last bread; she was just about to bake it and then she was going to die. But God spoke through Elijah. We don't read that God directly spoke to Elijah, but Elijah believed in God the word He had given him, that this woman would sustain him. And he said, *Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD*

*God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.* That's faith, isn't it, the exercise of faith.

There were two miracles in Zarephath. This was the first miracle – the barrel of meal wasting not throughout those years of drought. And the second miracle- the son of this widow woman died, and Elijah through prayer to God brought that son again to life. That is, the power of God through Elijah's faith. I think what we see in the case of Elijah is this – evidence that the spirit of faith and the grace of God exercised Elijah in all these days.

God spoke to Elijah again the fourth time. In the third year of the drought, in 1 Kings 18 we read, *And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went.* He probably did not know how he was going to find Ahab. Had he to go back to Samaria? Maybe that was the case, so he went southward. But then he met that man Obadiah, a servant of Ahab who was looking for Elijah at the command of Ahab. They probably met north of Samaria in the region of Mount Carmel. So Elijah didn't have to return so far as when he had gone to Zarephath. Now Obadiah feared to tell Ahab that he had found Elijah because if he did, Elijah would probably disappear again, and then Ahab would kill Obadiah. He feared for his life for telling untruths. But Elijah assured Obadiah he would meet him. And so he did. He spoke to Ahab instructing him to gather all the people to Mount Carmel, including Jezebel's prophets. Under the influence of God's spirit Elijah knew what he would do, and so we have that third miracle up on Mount Carmel where he prayed at the time of the evening sacrifice. Although Baal's prophet's sacrifice remained untouched with all their screaming and shouting and pleading, Elijah built that altar and even poured water upon it. Where they got the water from we are not told, but when he prayed, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. Elijah's prayer of faith. We read of his prayers of faith again in James. He prayed to God believing that God would answer his prayer in that time of the need to demonstrate to Israel that God was God, the living God and the true God. So this was not for Elijah's glory, it was for God's glory. Elijah was just the means God was using to show Israel that He was the true God.

We also read of the time of Elijah's great strength which God gave him, in slaying all the prophets of Baal. He didn't step back from doing that which was to the honour of God in destroying the prophets of Baal that were deceiving the people. Some might say, well that was very cruel. But are we going to question God's will to destroy the power of the enemy? Elijah received great strength to slay the prophets of Baal. God gave them into his hand.

Whilst there had been this fire from heaven, there was yet no rain. That was the promise of God. Elijah, again by faith, said to Ahab, *Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.* But the skies were still completely blue; there were no clouds. So Elijah went up again to the top of Mount Carmel and prayed again.

I don't know whether any of you have been up Mount Carmel? Several years ago I had the privilege

of going to Israel and one of the places we were taken to was Mount Carmel, where we climbed to the top and had a beautiful view of the Mediterranean Sea. It was here that Elijah knelt down and prayed. There was no immediate answer this time, not like when he had prayed before and fire had come down from heaven. Here was a trial of Elijah's faith for nothing happened immediately as it had done before. But where God gives faith, it's exercise is great faith under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Elijah said to his servant – who was his servant? We haven't heard of Elijah having a servant before. Was it the son of the widow woman whom he had brought back from Zarephath? We are not told. It could have been the son who he raised to life who had followed Elijah back, but there we must leave it. Elijah had a servant. And Elijah said to him, Go up seven times, keep looking, keep watching while I'm praying. Now there's some teaching for us there. If anything doesn't happen straight away, or in the time-scale when we think it should happen, we are not to give up praying. Especially if it's in accordance with the revealed will of God. Perhaps a promise is given to us, something which we definitely have need of, and it's for His glory- then do keep praying. *Men ought always to pray and not to faint* says Jesus, and that was Elijah's experience.

The servant saw a cloud, a small cloud, and he told Elijah. You don't get much rain from a small cloud, but Elijah believed this was the answer and that it was the beginning of the sound of abundance of rain. He believed this little cloud would grow and bring the rain which God had said. And so it was. The word of God is faithful, and it will be performed, do remember that. It may not be immediate nor in a way that we may know or imagine, but God will bring it to pass. What amazing strength again was given to Elijah! We read that he ran before Ahab's chariot into Jezreel. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Nothing is too hard for the Lord for one who faithfully believes. We read in Isaiah 40 about those who believe in God and trust in Him: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.* And there's no limit what the Lord can do, when He has a purpose for it.

But now a great change comes. Here is faithful Elijah, the Lord is with him and the Lord has led him by His Holy Spirit. He has obeyed and all has come to pass exactly as God spoke. But now there is a turning point, a pivot as we might say, in Elijah's life. Ahab tells Jezebel all that has taken place and that her prophets are killed. Then in her rage she threatens the life of Elijah. Elijah comes into great fear. We don't read of any prayer, or any exercise of faith and trust in God. It is as if the Lord leaves Elijah to his own earthly self and, in a panic, Elijah flees. Later on in the Scriptures, in the life of the apostle Paul, the apostle Paul had great visions. He was taken up into the third heaven, and there he heard things which were not lawful for an earthly man to hear. What he actually saw in that vision we are not exactly told, but O the influence it had upon him! In writing to the Corinthians he says, *lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.* And it brought Paul very low to depend entirely on the grace of God. That was where Paul's strength lay. Now in the account of Elijah, isn't

there a similarity? – Elijah, with all the success he'd had and power over Ahab and the people, he being a man of like passions as we are, how easily his pride could be lifted up. Now God will never let that happen with His people; God will ever exercise His people to keep them humble and dependent upon Him.

After this great event on Mount Carmel and all that was done there Elijah, as it were, 'came back to earth'. He was a man, with no strength of his own, and he came into great fear. O the Lord may cause the enemy to rise up against His people, to keep them humbly at His feet. So Elijah was left for a time, tempted into great fear for his life from a wicked woman. It was God who caused that turmoil of Elijah's mind to come, to keep him in the knowledge of his dependence upon God. I emphasise that point. Elijah would ever learn *without me* (says God) *ye can do nothing*. What does Elijah do? Under the influence left to his own mind and own understanding, he flees away from Jezreel, from Israel, right through Judah and Benjamin, towards Horeb, the Mount of God. Why did he choose there? He knew the Lord dwelt there, it was called the Mount of God, it was where God had given the law. The reasoning of Elijah's mind was that he was the only one left that believed in God, therefore what was the purpose of him now staying upon this earth with this woman wanting to kill him. He didn't want her to kill him, but he wanted God to take away his life. O how low a state Elijah came into as he fled down towards the Mount of Horeb, the Mount of God. You could almost say that he had come to the brink of suicide, as he desired to die. Now God would not let that happen of course. He came to that place where he was worn out and weary – the distance from Jezreel down to Horeb is 300 miles as the crow flies. It's a great long way, and he becomes faint and weary in the wilderness, so he lies down desiring to die. And he prays to God that the Lord will take away his life. But dear friends, we notice here this one thing. That although God had left Elijah to his own weakness and failings and fear of his own mind, God had not forsaken him. Elijah was one of the Lord's people, and His eye was still upon him. When he laid down under that juniper tree God sent an angel and provided food and said *Arise and eat* which he did. I think it was twice. And he went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights. Is anything too hard for the Lord? There was nothing else for him to eat there in the wilderness. There was no manna like given to the children of Israel when they came up northwards from Horeb, it was just a barren land. But the Lord maintained the life of Elijah, even though he was going his own way. O how merciful and gracious God is towards His people, even when they backslide and go in their own way, a way that seems right to them, but not influenced by faith or trust in God. There's an absence of prayer for the Lord to direct and guide yet the Lord does not slay His people. He still had a work for Elijah to do. So Elijah went miraculously on in this way, for forty days and forty nights. We think of Jesus, as a Man that was sustained for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness when He was tempted of Satan. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And then Elijah comes to Horeb and goes into a cave. What is he going to do now? I'm sure Elijah didn't really know what to do. He had come to the mount of God and had entered a cave, no doubt for shelter from the heat, but what was going to happen now? Dear friends, I am sure Elijah came to the brink of despair, but it's there God appears.

God's fifth word came to Elijah – *What doest thou here, Elijah?*. Elijah speaks and declares his own understanding of the circumstances of why he has come to where he is: *'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away'*. What a low state Elijah came in to, physically no doubt, and spiritually.

Then God spoke again, the sixth word, – *Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord*. Go out of the cave, stand on the mount before the Lord. My dear friends, if he had done, he would have been killed. He probably went towards the cave entrance but before he got there, the Lord sent that great wind; a whirlwind which brake the rocks. He sent an earthquake, He gave fire. We have those terrible scenes when God gave the law to Israel when they were sinners. How the mountains flowed down, they melt at the presence of God, and they smoke with fire – what a scene. What was the sin of Elijah? *That which is not of faith, is sin*. All that journey from Jezreel down to Horeb was a sinful journey, because it was not of the Lord; it was Elijah's own way, and not done in faith. But the power of the judgement of God, evident through that great wind, fire and earthquake, did not fall upon Elijah. There was no judgement of God to destroy Elijah for his sin. What came to Elijah was a still small voice, and that was the mercy and grace of God. The Lord was still mindful of Elijah, He hadn't dealt with him after sin, as he sins deserved.

God spoke to him again, God's seventh word to him, a repeat of the fifth word, – *What doest thou here, Elijah?* and Elijah gave the same answer. Dear friends, I'm sure Elijah didn't give it in the same way that he had done before. When God asked him the first time in the cave *What doest thou here, Elijah?*, he would probably have said very boldly those words which I've read, high in a zeal for the God of hosts and so forth. Now I'm sure he spoke more tenderly, why he was here, because he had thought of all these things which were not right, and he had sought to escape from them. And God said to him, Return, go back, there's three things I call you to do. Firstly, go and anoint Hazael, king over Syria in Damascus. That was much further north than where he came from, much further north than Jezreel. He was told to go and anoint Hazael, king over Syria in Damascus; anoint Jehu king of Israel; and call Elisha to be the prophet in his stead. Now Elisha, we're told, lived at Abelmeholah, which was on the west side of Jordan, opposite where the brook Cherith came into. So Elijah was to return; the nearest one was Elisha, the second nearest was Jehu, and then Hazael. Elijah's faith was restored by the word of God and the kindness of the word of God. Not by an angry voice, but *a still small voice*, of love, compassion and mercy. O the long-suffering of our God! This is what had effect on Elijah, and what restored his soul. So Elijah obeyed God in returning from Horeb, and he was assured that God had seven thousand men of Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

There is one thing we note. Elijah only fulfilled one of those three commands. He only did the third one and anointed Elisha. Elisha was ploughing; he was taking the benefit of the rain which had come to Israel. It was Elisha who fulfilled the other two commands that God spoke to Elijah. So we see that Elijah and Elisha was really one continuing prophecy. But Elijah still had work to do outside

of those three. He appointed Elisha, but God spoke to Elijah the ninth time. He says go and arise and meet Ahab again. He had a solemn prophecy against Ahab and his family because of the killing of Naboth. All Ahab's family would die, but not in Ahab's lifetime because Ahab had a measure of repentance and sorrow over what had been done. But Ahab's whole family would all die, they would have no issue, completely to be wiped out.

Now we know that Ahab died when Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to see Ahab because Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah's son had married the daughter of Ahab. Where there's marriage between two families, there's quite often a bond between those two families, isn't there? And it's just worth a point of note, that when Ahab says to Jehoshaphat to come to fight the battle with him, Jehoshaphat said, *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?*' Ahab said nothing about Elijah did he, or Elisha? Why, he took Micaiah out of the prison to come and speak, but Elijah and Elisha were about at the time. But we have to leave that. Micaiah said that Ahab would get killed, and he did. Micaiah was no doubt one of those seven thousand that never bowed the knee to Baal.

After Ahab had died, God spoke the tenth time to Elijah in the second book of Kings. Ahab's son Ahaziah was now king and he fell through a lattice and was very sick. He sent unto the idols of his father; Baal, Ashtaroth and so forth, to enquire whether he would live or not, or if he would get better. But God said to Elijah to declare to Ahaziah the son of Ahab that he would die after falling through this lattice. Then Ahaziah sent messengers because he understood this was Elijah, because he was a hairy man. When the first captain with fifty went to where Elijah was sitting on a hill, Elijah commanded fire to come down from heaven, just as he had done on Mount Carmel, praying to God, and the fire destroyed the captain and those fifty. And it happened the second time. This was to show the son of Ahab that God was the God of Israel. When the third captain went he pleaded with Elijah, "Spare me, do not let fire come down upon me". God spoke to Elijah, concerning the captain that had pleaded for his life, saying, *Go down with him, be not afraid of him, go and see this son of Ahab who is now king.* Why did God say, be not afraid? Was this not Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, the son of Jezebel – was not Jezebel still alive, no doubt in the same place as her son who was king? Elijah, you've fled from Jezebel for fear of your life, under your own understanding, through your own reasoning, but this is My word, this is My direction, go now and speak to Ahaziah and tell him the truth that he will not recover. 'Be not afraid, I am with you'. Again Elijah obeyed, renewed in faith, believed the word of God, restored. O how great and faithful is God!

Then we have God's final words to Elijah, when God would take him to heaven. God said to Elijah first to go from Gilgal where he was at the time, to Bethel which was southwards along the mountains of Ephraim. Then the second time, to go from Bethel to Jericho, which was eastwards from the mountains down into the plain of Jordan. Then thirdly, to go to the Jordan river itself. Now we find that Elijah obeyed without question, as he had done in the very beginning when God told him

to go to the brook Cherith, and when God told him to go to Zarephath. Elijah was completely restored in faith. He was really a sinner saved by the grace of God and he now walked again with God. We read of the sons of the prophets, which were some of the seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal, that they knew that Elijah would be taken away. Elisha also knew it, and Elijah himself knew it. His time of departing from this earth had come. It was the powerful witness amongst those of the Lord's people there by the Holy Spirit. At the river Jordan, the fourth miracle by the hand of Elijah took place; the waters of Jordan parted when Elijah smote them with his mantle. No doubt there was prayer in his heart, although it may not have been expressed and it certainly wasn't recorded. No doubt prayer in his heart up unto God that it would be so, and that by striking the waters he would be able to pass over. He had no power himself, his dependence was upon God, through faith in his God.

And then we have the last words spoken by Elijah, which are recorded in second book of Kings, chapter two, verse ten. He asked Elisha, *Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.* Elisha answered, *I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* Elijah said, *Thou hast asked a hard thing-* it was something he could not do or give himself. Elijah was a humble man, completely dependent upon God, and he really answered in accordance with the will of God when he said, *If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.* The evidence was to be of God, and the Lord would give a double portion of the same spirit. So we find that is what came to pass, when Elijah was separated from Elisha. Elisha saw the chariot of fire and it separated him and Elijah. Elijah was carried up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elijah did not taste of death; what an amazing thing that is. We have another one who did not taste of death, that is Enoch. At the very beginning, Enoch walked with God and was not. We read that Enoch by faith pleased God, by faith he obeyed God, and in the spirit he served God. That's exactly the description of Elijah, isn't it? By faith he pleased God, by faith he obeyed God, in the Spirit he served God, and except for that teaching of God concerning Elijah's own self, Elijah walked with God. Oh what a season that was when he was greatly tried, but through the mercy of God he came forth as gold. The Lord knew the way that he took, and the Lord never left or forsook him.

We read one other thing concerning Elijah, not to do with the kings of Israel, but to do with the king of Judah. It's an account perhaps that we don't often recognise or see. The son of Jehoshaphat who married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel became king of Judah after Jehoshaphat died, and his name was Jehoram. Jehoram had many brothers and when he was established as king, he killed all his brothers to ensure his kingship. Jehoram worshipped the gods of Israel, not the Lord God of his father Jehoshaphat. We read that Elijah sent a letter to Jehoram. He did not go down into Judah himself. The letter said that because Jehoram had behaved so evilly, he would become very ill with a disease of his bowels, and they would fall out and he would die. And so it came to pass. Elijah was a true prophet of the Lord, because a true prophet is known by that which he speaks, - it comes to pass. A true prophet of the Lord, a man of God.



So what do we conclude through this account of Elijah? Generally, it tells us God is sovereign. He works all things after the counsel of His will. God is almighty, nothing is impossible with God. God is a consuming fire. He is also a God of love. God is faithful. He will never leave nor forsake His people, and all their times are in God's hand. All these lessons we learn again and again throughout Scripture, but how significant they are at the time of Elijah.

And then personally, God will use who He will to perform His work. God gives the faith to obey and to do His will. God hears and answers the prayers of faith, of those whom He has called to follow Him and to do His will. God supplies all the needs of His people. God will permit evil to try His people's faith but He will never leave them, nor forsake them. And God calls His people to glory, to be with Him in His time and in His way.

Well there are those points which we find so clear in the account of Elijah. Now Elijah's God is our God. We do not know how He may use us. I do pray that the Lord will use many of you to His honour and glory and for the furtherance of the gospel. But it's the Lord's sovereign will whom He may use, and in different ways, whether boy, girl, man or woman, whoever it may be, we are to seek and pray 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do'. And the exhortation through David in Psalm sixty-two is *Trust in Him at all times, ye people. Though mysterious be your way, trust in Him at all times, pour out your heart before Him, God is a refuge for us, Selah.* He knows the way you take, and when He has tried you (and we have many trials of our faith which is given by the blessing of the Holy Spirit) He will ensure we come forth as gold and to know what Jesus Christ hath done for the good of our souls. *I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.* O young people, seek the way of God for the good of your soul, be obedient to His word. Trust in him at all times, continue in prayer, and the God of all grace will be with you.

Amen.