

Elijah the Prophet

By David Feddes

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the worst of times as far as political leadership went. Ahab was king, and Ahab had been married to a pagan princess named Jezebel. Jezebel's father was the king of Sidon, and he was a key player in international trade. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel turned out to be a great financial deal. The marriage brought a stream of money, and a flood of evil. Jezebel brought pagan gods and pagan priests to Israel; but Ahab didn't mind marrying someone who despised God and despised God's word. Why not worship various gods and mix different faiths together? Ahab and his wife Jezebel were the worst king and queen in the history of the kingdom of Israel.

But sometimes when things are darkest, the stars shine most brightly. And in that terribly dark time, the great prophet Elijah was sent by God. And Elijah went to Ahab and Jezebel, and he came to them with a prophecy. He told them that it would not be raining for quite a while. Now our weather forecasters try to predict the next few days. Elijah predicted the next few years: dry, dry, and dry. "Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.' And the word of the Lord came to Elijah, 'Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there'" (1 Kings 17:1–4). Elijah had to keep a very low profile, because wicked kings and queens don't really like hearing prophecies of disaster on their country. And this was going to be a terrible dry spell, with terrible suffering by many people in the country. Eventually, though, the brook dried up, and Elijah had to go somewhere else for food.

God sent him to a territory outside of Israel. He sent him to a widow, whose young son was also there. She was preparing a final meal before they ran out of food completely and would starve to death. Elijah asked them for some food. She said, "This is all we've got, and we're going to eat it and then we're going to die." Elijah said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth'" (1 Kings 17:14).

This widow lived in Sidon, which was the realm of Jezebel's father. It was the center of Baal worship. The false god Baal could not protect his own homeland from the drought that had been sent by the God of Israel. God showed himself to be judge not only of Israel, but of other nations too. At the same time, God showed himself savior of persons beyond Israel, who believed in the living God. Even as God dried up Baal's home turf, he chose a woman and child from that vile country to be saved through faith. Jesus later on mentioned this woman as a display of God's unexpected mercy to people outside of Israel (Luke 4:25–26). Elijah was showing God's judgment against the pagan nation but also God's mercy for a particular pagan widow and her child.

Later this woman's son fell ill and died, and she was heartbroken. She went to Elijah and said, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" And Elijah said to her, "Give me your son."

And he cried out to the Lord, “O Lord, my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn by killing her son? O Lord, my God, let this child's life come into him again.” And the Lord heard Elijah's prayer. The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:17–24).

Notice here how great God's work is through the prophet Elijah, raising someone from the dead! This foreshadowed the great Son of God himself coming into our world, raising people from the dead, and himself coming back from the dead.

Showdown

After a while, God sends Elijah back to meet with Ahab. Meanwhile, Ahab has assassins out looking for Elijah to kill him. Elijah comes to Ahab's chief of staff, Obadiah. Elijah says to Obadiah that he wants to meet with Ahab. Obadiah says, “No way! If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he'll kill me.” He's that as soon as he's finished speaking, Elijah's just going to disappear again.

Obadiah says, “I, your servant, have worshiped the Lord since my youth. Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water” (1 Kings 18:3–13). While Ahab's killers have been looking for Elijah, Obadiah, the chief of staff for Ahab and Jezebel, has been rescuing prophets. He thinks that Elijah should have heard about this through some other believers among the prophets.

When we look at the contrast between Elijah and Obadiah, we see that Elijah was a prophet; Obadiah was a politician. Elijah lived in wild, remote places; Obadiah lived in palaces. Elijah rebuked royalty to their face; Obadiah worked within the system. Elijah was God's chief prophet; Obadiah was chief of staff for the wickedest king in Israel's history. We might be tempted to praise the prophet and to condemn the politician. But both were faithful to God. Not every politician is called to be a prophet. Obadiah used his political skills—his smoothness, his shrewdness—to do much good to protect God's people in very tough times. It was Elijah's calling to get in somebody's face, even the king's face. It was Obadiah's calling to be a more political person. Each carried out his own calling to serve the Lord in his own way.

At any rate, Obadiah tells Ahab that Elijah wants to meet, so Ahab goes. And when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” Elijah answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:17–18). It says in the book of Proverbs, “A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord” (Proverbs 19:3). That's exactly what Ahab did. He was the one whose sin brought judgment. He was the one who was ruining Israel, yet his heart raged against the prophet of the Lord.

Elijah says he wants a showdown. He wants to gather all the people together, and he wants a showdown with Baal to prove whether that god is real or not. So the people gather together.

Elijah comes near to all the people and says, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word (1 Kings 18:21). You see, they were trying to hedge their bets. They were trying to cover all their bases. They thought it was safest to serve more than one god. They didn't say that they had forsaken the Lord completely. They just wanted to worship Baal as well. Elijah says, “You need to make up your mind.”

And so, he calls for a test. He calls for all the prophets of Baal to set up an altar, and to kill a bull and put it on the altar, and then call on Baal to send down fire from heaven on their sacrifice. Elijah will set up an altar, and he'll make a sacrifice of a bull on that altar and call for the Lord God to send fire. Whichever god sends fire is going to be the true God.

The prophets of Baal do their thing. Hundreds and hundreds of them are praying and praying, and they're not getting results. Elijah starts laughing at them and mocking them. He says, “Maybe Baal is out relieving himself! Or maybe he's taking a nap!” The prophets of Baal begin to cut themselves and to dance all over, trying desperately to get Baal's attention, but Baal doesn't answer (1 Kings 18:25–29).

Then Elijah sets up an altar, and he slaughters a bull on that altar. Just to make things more interesting and more difficult, Elijah said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time, and the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water (1 Kings 18:33–35). He's trying to make it as hard as possible. You see, he wants to really make this a convincing showdown.

Elijah was calling for a showdown so that the people would make a decision, and he even gave Baal home field advantage. This showdown occurred on Mount Carmel, near Sidon, a stronghold of Baal worship. And lightning or fire from heaven was supposed to be Baal's specialty. He was supposed to be a god of thunder and lightning and rain. Baal's team of prophets outnumbered Elijah 850 to one. So you have Baal's team of 850 prophets praying loudly all day long, and you have Elijah. He prays quietly, for one minute. You have Baal's prophets using wood so dry it would ignite with just a spark, and Elijah drenches his wood with water. But Baal couldn't produce even that one spark to light that sacrifice.

When Elijah said his brief, quiet prayer, he said, “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench (1 Kings 18:36–38). God sent fire that vaporized that whole offering. And the people cried out, “The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!” And Elijah said, “Now seize those prophets of Baal!” And those prophets were seized and killed (1 Kings 18:39–40). Elijah wins this great showdown with the false god Baal and with his host of prophets.

Then Elijah goes to pray, because lightning is not really what they want the most. They need rain after three years of drought. Elijah prays and he prays, and he tells a servant, “Go up, look toward the sea.” And he went up and looked and said, “There's nothing.” He said, “Go again,” seven times. And at the seventh time, he said, “Behold, a little cloud, like a man's hand, is rising

from the sea.” And Elijah said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you’” (1 Kings 18:43–44). He sees this one little teeny-tiny cloud, and he is expecting a huge downpour. And he sends the message to Ahab to hurry up and get in before the rain really comes down on you. “And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:45–46). He has supernatural power from God to outrun the swiftest horses in the kingdom.

That's quite a winning streak for Elijah. He speaks a word that stops all rain. What tremendous power from God is in his prophecies! He receives food from God-sent birds to provide for him. Then he eats a widow's food, and that food just keeps on coming and coming miraculously and doesn't run out. He raises a dead boy to life. He tells off a nasty king right to his face. He calls down fire from heaven. He wipes out idol-worshiping priests. He speaks a prayer that brings a downpour of rain on the thirsty kingdom. Then he outruns the king's fastest horses. Those are some great highlights, and you'd expect him to really be feeling good after all that.

Burnout

But just about then, Elijah crashes and burns. He wants to die. Listen to 1 Kings 19.

¹ Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.

⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰ He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death."

¹⁸ "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Elijah has that mountaintop high, that tremendous triumph on Mount Carmel, but it gives way to a dreadful low. That's how it is often with our own lives. A thrilling triumph one day seems to make no difference the next day. You were riding high, you felt so full of joy and power and victory, and the next day, it seems so unreal, as though it never happened, like it made no impact.

Elijah was hoping that everything would turn around after the Mount Carmel showdown. But Jezebel was as nasty as ever. When you're burned out and broken down, sometimes a dark, cold fog of despair clouds your spirit. That's what happened to Elijah. And that depressed, downcast spirit comes on many people, including those who serve the Lord.

You feel like society is getting worse and worse and worse. Government is doing more harm than good. The church is rotting, and it's shriveling. Fewer people are going, and the ones that do go seem to be not much good. You think, "I'm a loser, my life is a miserable failure." If you're in ministry and things aren't going well and the people aren't apparently coming to the Lord, you feel like giving up. "It's over. It's hopeless. It's no use. I wish I was dead. I won't kill myself, but I don't see much point in living anymore." Elijah was not the first to experience such things, and he's not the last.

When we read about Elijah in the Bible, he's an amazing person. We've read about some of his highlights, and when you read the highlights, it's hard to believe he was a guy like us. But James says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. And he prayed fervently that it might not rain,

and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit” (James 5:17–18). It's a tremendous encouragement to know that we're like Elijah, and Elijah was like us. It was the power of prayer that brought it about great things in Elijah's ministry. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). Our prayers can have power like Elijah's. When we read the story of Elijah, it's tremendous encouragement to pray and to count on the promises of God. But it's also somewhat encouraging to know that he was not just superman, that Elijah was not some superstar that nothing could discourage. When we become depressed and feel like giving up, we're in good company.

Elijah, the great prophet, could sometimes feel that way. Jeremiah the prophet could feel that way. Others too could really feel downcast and feel like giving up at times. Even the great John the Baptist, who was Elijah for his day to prepare the way of the Lord—even the great John the Baptist, when he was cast into prison and was struggling, sent a message to Jesus: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we be looking for somebody else?” (Luke 7:19–20). So it's possible for the greatest of servants of God to be shaken by their circumstances and to feel cast down.

What Elijah needed

What did Elijah need? First of all, he just needed his body to be refreshed. A worn-out body needs to be restored. He needed food. He needed something to drink. He needed rest. He needed sleep. Never underestimate the importance of taking care of your own body.

We sometimes notice it with little children. They're really crabby and crying and wailing, and you might say, “Oh, naughty child! You quit crying!” But you might instead have to give them some food because they're really, really hungry. And that's all they need. Or they may need to just go to bed. It's past their bedtime, and the reason they're crabby is because they need their sleep. Let's face it, that's not just for little kids. We all need our food and drink. We all need our sleep. When our body is worn down, it affects our spirit. We're vulnerable to discouragement and despair if we're malnourished, if we're exhausted from not enough rest, not enough sleep.

Elijah gets his physical needs met by God in a quite extraordinary way. He gets angel food cake, a cake from heaven delivered by an angel. That food carries him for forty days while he makes the trek to Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:5–8). He needs his body to be refreshed.

After some rest and food, a burnt-out spirit needs to be renewed. Sometimes you just need to get away. God takes Elijah away from all the hassles and troubles and brings him back to a key point in the history of Israel's life—Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, the place where Moses met God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–2), the place where God gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:20; 20:1–17). God brought him there.

Sometimes that's what you need. You need to just get away from the hassles, the troubles, and go spend time with God, and hear God's voice and experience God's presence. Then you go from burnout to renewal and to rejoining God's mission.

That's what happened with Elijah. That's what can happen for us. And if I'm speaking to someone who's involved in ministry, and you're feeling burnt out right now, just realize your body needs help, and your spirit needs renewal. So make sure you're spending time with God, listening for his voice, enjoying his presence, and getting a fresh sense again of what he's calling you to do and who he's calling you to be.

Invisible Whisperer

When we hear this story of Elijah's encounter with God on Mount Sinai, we hear the voice of the Invisible Whisperer. That voice may not seem to amount to much. But it is the voice of the Almighty.

We might want loud, showy signs and wonders. But the fact is, signs and wonders don't often change hearts. Jezebel's reaction to fire from heaven and tremendous miracles through the prophet Elijah was to order Elijah's death (1 Kings 19:1–2). Or think back to when the people of Israel were in Egypt under Pharaoh's oppression. God sent plague after plague after plague—did miracle after miracle after miracle. He even parted the Red Sea. And Pharaoh did not get a clue and repent. Instead, he sent his troops right into the Red Sea after the Israelites (Exodus 7–14).

Miracles don't change hard hearts. Jesus did fantastic miracles. Right after he fed the five thousand, the religious leaders came to him and said, "Do a miracle. What sign are you going to show us?" (John 6:30). Well, he had done some amazing signs, and they were still asking for more signs. Later on, Jesus raised his dead friend Lazarus back to life again (John 11:43–44). And what was the response? Those leaders were plotting to kill Jesus, and then they wanted to kill Lazarus too (John 12:10–11). That's what signs and wonders did for wicked people.

You may be thinking to yourself, "I wish I could do the great and mighty things Elijah did." If God chooses to do that through you, fine. Sometimes it is God's way to perform amazing wonders. But don't think that's the key to changing all the hearts and minds. Loud wonders often don't change heart, but God's whisper does. Even when he's not doing marvels, the Invisible Whisperer is at work, and he is all-powerful.

God controls all things. There on Mount Sinai, he controls that wind, he controls that mighty earthquake, he controls that fire, but his presence and will are not in those things. God's presence and will are rarely expressed in noisy, flashy displays of power. That still small voice of God coming near is worth more than all the outward fireworks. Notice how Elijah reacted as soon as he heard that still small voice. He knew that God was coming near in an amazing way. Elijah covered his face because now he knew he was in the presence of God.

The Invisible Whisperer is quiet. He's often ignored. But he is the one who shapes the destiny of nations. He is the one who brings faith into the hearts of people. He is the one who preserves his prophets, and who protects his own and who keeps people for himself. Think of the power of that whisper.

Think just for a moment of the power of something totally unseen, something that seems totally powerless: human thoughts. You can't see a thought. A thought in and of itself really can't do

anything, and yet it does almost everything. Human thought is more powerful than a whale or an elephant. Human thought has had power to harness many of the great energies and detain many of the mightiest beasts. And human thought is still nothing compared to the almighty thought of God himself that brings about all things and directs them. So don't just go by what you can see, what you can touch, how strong something seems, because God's whisper is all-powerful. God showed that to Elijah.

Elijah forgot some things, and God's whisper reminded him of those things. He reminded Elijah that God has people in unlikely places. Obadiah was Ahab's and Jezebel's chief official, their chief of staff. Sure, he was a politician and not a prophet, but he was a man of God and he was faithful to the Lord, and Elijah knew it. He had just met with Obadiah not long before that. How could he say that he and he alone was the only one left? Think for a moment of how hard it must have been to be Obadiah, working right under the gaze of Ahab and Jezebel every day, going to work right in the presence of those wicked people and trying to protect God's prophets and trying to minimize the damage that was being done by those terrible rulers.

God always has his people, sometimes in very unlikely places. In the New Testament, we read that Herod hated Jesus. He had John the Baptist killed, and the various Herods were all wicked men. But we also read of people right in Herod's own household who were following Jesus and among his disciples (Luke 8:3; Acts 13:1). There were people in the household of Caesar in Rome, and those Caesars—Caligula and Nero—were horrible, horrible men. And yet, right in their own household, even among their own guards, there were followers of Jesus (Philippians 4:22). Always, always God has people in unlikely places.

God didn't just have other people beside Elijah; he had other prophets. We know that at least 100 prophets had been rescued (1 Kings 18:4). We know that not long after this, the prophet Micaiah would get in Ahab's face and predict his death, and Ahab would go to his death (1 Kings 22:13–38). Elijah says, "I'm the only one left. I need to have a pity party. I might as well die. There's nobody out there, nobody serving God." Oh yes, there is, and Elijah should have known it already. God always keeps at least a remnant, and that remnant may be a lot bigger than a discouraged leader might think. God said 7,000 had never bowed to Baal at all (1 Kings 19:18). And who knows how many others turned back from Baal and repented and went back to worshipping Yahweh, the Lord, the great "I AM," after Elijah's showdown on Mount Carmel. Ahab and Jezebel remained enemies of God, but who knows what impact Elijah's testimony had there?

We must always remember the power of God and remember that we are not the ones who can tell how many people God has left. When we think there's zero, God says, "I've got at least 7000," and he's adding more every day.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul could sometimes get discouraged at the response of Jewish people to his message. Some believed, but many others did not. And then Paul said, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 'Lord, they've killed your prophets, they've demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for myself 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" So too at the

present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Romans 11:2–5). God always keeps a remnant, and his grace is the key to it all.

No more pity party

Elijah thinks he's alone. But God already has Elijah's successor in mind. In fact, Elisha will turn out to do even greater miracles than Elijah. When you read about the ministry of Elisha, he raises more people from the dead. He does amazing things by the power of God. Elijah thinks he's the end of the line, the last hope of Israel. And God has somebody waiting in the wings already who's going to do even greater things.

As a follower of Jesus, I'm dear to God, and he can do great things through me just as he did through Elijah. But I'm not indispensable. God's work on earth goes on when I'm gone. His work on earth will go on when you're gone. He treasures you, but don't think, “I'm the only one left, and it all depends on me!” God can raise up others—and he does.

Never forget: God's kingdom keeps going on earth, and you will live forever in heaven. That's our ultimate destiny. God will keep things going without us when the time comes, and he will take us to be with him in glory. That's what he reveals to us in his Word.

Elijah prayed to die. God never answered that prayer. Elijah never did die. Later on, God just took Elijah straight up to heaven. Elijah was walking along with Elisha, and as they were walking along together and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). What a way to go! Elijah is one of the two people, along with Enoch, who never died at all but was taken up straight to God (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). The man who thought it was all over, who wished he were dead, never did die. He triumphed over death.

For each of us, God promises that after we've served in this life, he takes us to glory to be with him. When you're tempted by burnout, when you're tempted to self-pity and to give up, remember God's prophet Elijah. Even the greatest of prophets could fall into such discouragement and sorrow. But God had his hand on him even then. He was tempted to give up on God's work among God's people. But God had his own people and always will: a remnant chosen by grace.

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
but the church of Jesus constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never against that church prevail.
We have God's own promise, and that cannot fail.

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Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” (1 Kings 17:1)

And the word of the Lord came to him: “Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” (17:2-3)

“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” (17:14)

And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” And he said to her, “Give me your son.” (17:18-19)

And he cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?...O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.” (17:19-21)

The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived... And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.” (17:22-24)

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“Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (18:37-38)

Elijah said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” And he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said, “Go again,” seven times. And at the seventh time he said, “Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.’” (18:43-44)

And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (18:45-46)

Elijah's recent highlights

- Speaks the word that stops all rain.
- Receives food from God-sent birds
- Eats widow's food that doesn't run out
- Raised dead boy to life
- Tells off a nasty king to his face
- Calls down fire from heaven
- Wipes out idol-worshiping priests
- Speaks the prayer that brings rain
- Outruns the king's fastest horses

¹ Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.

⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰ He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

¹¹ And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.”

¹⁸ “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Burnout and breakdown

- A mountaintop high gives way to a dreadful low. A thrilling triumph one day seems to make no difference the next day.
- A dark, cold fog of despair clouds your spirit.
- Society is getting worse and worse.
- The government is hurting, not helping.
- The church is rotting and shriveling.
- I’m a loser. My life is a miserable failure.
- It’s hopeless. It’s no use. I wish I was dead.

A man with a nature like ours

- Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (James 5:17-18)
- Our prayers can have power like Elijah's.
- When we become depressed and feel like giving up, we are in good company: Elijah, Jeremiah, and others felt that way at times.

What Elijah needed

- **A worn down body needs to be refreshed.**
Nutrition: food and drink
Rest: plenty of sleep
- **A burnt out spirit needs to be renewed.**
Get away from the hassles and troubles.
Go spend time with God.
Hear God's voice.
Experience God's presence.
Rejoin God's mission.

Invisible whisperer

- Signs and wonders seldom change hearts: Jezebel's reaction to fire from heaven was to order Elijah's death.
- God controls wind, earthquake, and fire, but his presence and will are rarely expressed in noisy, flashy displays of power.
- The still, small voice of God coming near is worth more than outward fireworks.
- The Invisible Whisperer, though quiet and often ignored, shapes the destiny of nations.

What lonely Elijah forgot

- God has people in unlikely places. Obadiah was Ahab's and Jezebel's chief official! A godly politician is not a prophet.
- God has other prophets: at least 100 had been rescued.
- God's always keeps at least a remnant, and it may be much bigger than a discouraged leader might think. Seven thousand never bowed to Baal at all. And who knows how many turned back from Baal to Yahweh?

Has God rejected his people?

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” But what is God's reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. (Rom 11:2-5)

Will God’s cause die with me?

- Elijah thinks he is alone, yet God already has Elijah’s successor in mind. In fact, Elisha will do even greater miracles than Elijah.
- As a follower of Jesus, I am dear to God, and He can do great things through me—but His work on earth goes on when I’m gone.
- Never forget: God’s kingdom keeps going on earth, and you will live forever in heaven.
- Elijah prayed to die—but he never did. Later God took him straight to heaven.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11-12)

No more pity party

Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus
constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never
'gainst that church prevail.
We have God’s own promise,
And that cannot fail.