

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Lessons from the life of Elijah: Elijah - Cast upon God

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we have reached the last of our sessions on Elijah. If you have been following these sessions you will know that we have been studying the prophet's life from 1 Kings 17 and 18. Previously, we have looked at Elijah himself as a prophet of the living God, in 1 Kings 17:1-7, noticing his fearlessness, obedience and dependence upon the LORD. Then from 1 Kings 17:8-24 we learned about Elijah as the man of God, while for the third talk we glanced at the 1 Kings 18:1-46. We saw Elijah as the champion of God, emphasising his stand for God, his confidence in God, and his expectation from God. This week we close the series with a study from 1 Kings 19:1-21 under the general title "Cast upon God".

Last week my friend Glenn Baxter spoke of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and how he, Elijah, promised that the drought, which had blighted the land of Israel, would come to a sudden end. 1 Kings 18:1-45 states: "Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel."

Now, one would think that Elijah, having utterly defeated the prophets of Baal, in addition to successfully prophesying the end of the drought, would be received in triumph at the royal court. 1 Kings 19:1-4 tell a different story, however, as we can read from the New King James Version: "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.' And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'"

From these verses I think that we could justly call this section, 'Elijah's despair' for he seems to have reached rock bottom. I would judge he approached Jezreel with high expectations that the king and queen would lead the nation back to the faithful worship of Yahweh, by removing all traces of Baal and other false gods. From later verses, which we shall consider in a few minutes, we can also conclude that Elijah was more than a little proud of his part in the whole affair.

Before dealing with Elijah, however, I wish to comment upon the attitude of Ahab. He had witnessed the tremendous demonstration of God's power that Elijah had brought about on Mount Carmel, when the fire consumed the sacrifice, an act that the prophets of Baal could not replicate, however hard they tried (1 Kings 18:20-40). He had also watched the clouds gather and the rain fall after Elijah's confident declaration that the long drought was over. (1 Kings 18:41-46)

Consequently, he must have reported these things to Jezebel in the expectation that she would receive them as a true account. Sadly, the wicked queen dominated the weak king, who bent to the inclination of her words. If Ahab had been impressed with the work and word of Elijah, he soon released any illusions that the people of Israel would return to the worship of the LORD their God, when he listened to the ravings of Jezebel. How careful we, who follow the Lord Jesus, must be in our choice of friends and intimates. It is so easy to be led astray from a pathway of fidelity to God by the words of those with no faith, however kind or good-natured they might be, and Jezebel was neither kind nor good natured!

Turning now to Elijah, we must take note of the tremendous difference in the attitude he displayed in 1 Kings 18:18-19, where he boldly stands before Ahab demanding a contest with the prophets of Baal, and that of 1 Kings 19:3 where he ran for his life. Krummacher, in his volume on Elijah, *Elijah the Tishbite* singles out the reason for the failure, and I quote his words from page 105: "The very words of the sacred narrative seem to give us a significant hint respecting his state of mind at this period. For the words are, 'When he saw that.' What did Elijah see? Not God's promises, aid, power, and faithfulness; these at least only dawned upon him in the background, with broken and feeble rays. But in the foreground very different things appeared; the infuriated Jezebel threatening his life, and all the horrors of a cruel death. Instead of soaring above these on eagle's wings...the pressure of human terror seems to have been too strong for his mind..."

Up to this point, Elijah had been empowered by his faith in God. It is said of Moses, in Hebrews 11:27 that "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Elijah failed because he saw a wicked woman and not the living God.

What a tragic picture is set before us in 1 Kings 19:4, which was quoted a little earlier in our talk, where we found Elijah under a juniper tree, or broom tree as the New King James puts it, despairing of his life. How this mighty giant of faith has crumbled before the power of the court. A difficult, yet essential, lesson for us all to learn is that we cannot walk by faith and by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

A chorus that the children used to sing, in the Sunday Club I am connected with, tells about the spies entering the land of Canaan to ascertain the conditions there. It has the lines:

*"Ten saw giants tough and tall,  
Two saw grapes in clusters fall".*

These lines illustrate just what I mean by walking by faith, because the ten spies could only see the difficulties that were in the way, whereas the two were confident that God would deliver them from their enemies, enabling them to enjoy the fruits of the land. Elijah could only see the difficulties with the result was that he was cast down in his spirit.

His darkness begins to lift when the LORD, instead of answering Elijah's prayer for death, commences to feed and encourage his desolate servant. How great the displays of grace we see in 1 Kings 19:5-8: "Then as [Elijah] lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.' So he arose, and ate and drank: and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God."

When Elijah was ready to die, God gave to him sleep and food. A cake baked upon coals and a drink of water might not seem much to some, yet for Elijah it was the oasis of rest as he sheltered in the shadow of the tree. On rising, he resumed his journey with more of the glad confidence of his former days

What can we take from this verse that would assist us in our walk of faith with God? It seems to me that the word of God, ministered in the power of the Spirit, is sufficient for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that we should be complete and ready for every good work. If those words sound familiar, you can read them again in the 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Elijah was so refreshed by the ministrations of the angel that he was enabled to undertake a forty day journey to the mountain known as Horeb. My point is that when we begin to lose our way on our pilgrimage, it is then when we need to pray consistently, and to rely upon heavenly resources. As a favourite hymn of mine states:

*"Is the wilderness before thee,  
Desert lands where drought abides?  
Heavenly springs shall there restore thee,  
Fresh from God's exhaustless tides.*

*Light divine surrounds thy going,  
God Himself shall mark thy way,  
Secret blessings, richly flowing,  
Lead to everlasting day."*

May we all, through God's grace, experience the living waters, security and rest, as experienced by Elijah.

Truly, when he ran from Jezebel's threats, despondent and defeated, it seemed that life would never be the same again, for he thought he was in that dreadful plight of being forsaken of God. Now, if not directly at the command of God, yet certainly sustained by His providential care, Elijah moves away from the broom tree. If ever there was a time when he needed the intervention of God it was when he first flopped down in the shade of that tree. Now the reinvigorated prophet strides on through the trackless desert with purpose in his step. No longer running away from Jezebel, but forging ahead to the holy mount in the strength of the food granted to him by God, though, when he arrives there, he still has lessons to learn, as shall see.

We must pause here, for a moment, to consider the reason that caused this rock of a man to turn in terror from the threats of a powerful, yet wicked, woman. I would suggest that we find it in 1 Kings 19:9-10: "And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'"

It has been pointed out by others that Elijah was unduly concerned with his service and with his own importance. After the miracle at Mount Carmel, matters had not been resolved as he thought they would. Instead of a national revival for the worship of Yahweh, he received the murderous invective of Jezebel. One writer, AW Pink, puts the reason for Elijah's distress and flight as: "The workings of pride...choke the exercises of faith."

Speaking personally, I have to admit the similarities between Elijah and myself, especially with regard to the failure of his faith.

In a different context, the Apostle James observes that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. (James 5:17) This could be both a corrective and an encouragement to us. James, in his letter, cited the example of Elijah, when he urged the Christians, to whom he wrote, to pray effectively and fervently. These men of faith, from the past, were not spiritual supermen without the foibles of humanity. Though they were able to exercise great faith they were also capable of failure when they looked away from the LORD to dwell upon their own importance. We, and again I speak personally, are just as likely to meander into the by-roads of pride and self importance. He is our source of power which we forget at our peril.

Another point I would like to introduce here is the holy associations that Mount Horeb would bring to Elijah. I do not doubt that he would recall that this was the place where the LORD appeared to Moses. Would he also remember that Moses had blessed the Israelites with the favour of Him who dwelt in the bush? (Exodus 3:21) It was at Horeb that the smitten rock released a flow of fresh water to the children of Israel, as they wound their way through the wilderness. Sinai, with all its sacred memories, was nearby, and we must never forget that the God who revealed Himself to them at Sinai has revealed Himself to us, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Also, the life-giving stream that so refreshed and invigorated the Israelites, at Horeb, has a counterpart in Him, who said He would give living water to the woman at Sychar's well and unto all who believe in Him. (John 4:10-14)

As we read further verses of the narrative, we must notice that God has not finished His dealings with Elijah for, as we saw in 1 Kings 19:9-10, the LORD asks the prophet the pertinent question, "What are you doing here, Elijah." Elijah is directly confronted with his error in running away. God dealt graciously with him at the height of his depression, yet the prophet has to face the facts of his unbelief and disobedience. We, too, should consistently ask ourselves the same question, if we would walk that pathway that is pleasing to the Lord Jesus. There are times when we could find ourselves in places, or company, that is not conducive to Christians. From time immemorial one of the enemies of a disciple is love of the world, as the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 2:15-17.

Before we consider Elijah's answer to the question, can I say that it is important that we today hear the Lord's voice? Some Christians have wandered so far away that they are deaf to the promptings of the Spirit. Thankfully, Elijah was still in range of communications from on high. When faced with the question, the erring prophet seeks to justify his actions as the end result of caring for, and guarding, the interests of God. Within his explanation, however, is the real reason for him being away from Samaria. The phrase, "they seek to take my life", (1 Kings 19:14) tells us all we need to know. He was frightened of being killed. As Elijah still seems to be in denial that he had done anything wrong, the LORD orders him to leave the darkness and gloom of the cave to stand on the mountain of the LORD, where, as the lawyers used to say, he will learn something to his advantage.

1 Kings 19:11-12 state: "Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.' And behold the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks into pieces 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."

What appear to be three visitations of natural phenomena are reminiscent of the time that the law was given to Moses on the nearby Sinai. From Exodus 19:18 we find that: "... Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly."

Exodus 19:16 tells us there were thunderings and lightnings and thick clouds at the same time. To understand just what was happening, we must take note that God was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. (1 Kings 19:11) The commentator, AW Pink, wrote regarding this passage: "God was not dealing with Elijah on the ground of legal covenant. That threefold negative is the Spirit saying to us, Elijah had, 'not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest' (Hebrews 12:18). Rather was the prophet addressed by the 'still, small voice', which was plain intimation that he had come to Mount Zion' (Hebrews 12:22), the Mount of grace."

The LORD was also teaching the prophet that He could, if He so willed, use a variety of powers, and spectacular methods, to carry out His purposes. He was not bound to utilise Elijah who was but one servant among the many, remaining loyal to God, despite the prophet's claim that he alone was left of the true worshippers of God. The fact that

He spoke to Elijah in 'a still small voice', was indicative that the LORD did not always work through spectacular signs or demonstrations of mighty power. By wrapping his mantle around his face, Elijah was indicating his reverence and respect for God, as he emerged from his gloom and introspection.

So now, as we reach the end of the chapter, and the conclusion of our talk this morning, we find the prophet restored to useful service, as we can read in 1 Kings 19:15-17. From these verses, we learn that firstly Elijah was to return and anoint Hazael as king over Syria. He would deal with the prophet's first complaint that the children of Israel had forsaken the covenant, and so, eventually, Hazael scourged the nation of Israel. Secondly, Jehu was anointed as king over Israel to deal with the prophet's second criticism, that 'the people had thrown down the altars and slain the prophets.' 1 Kings 20-22 show how Jehu dealt with Ahab and Jezebel, thus ridding the nation of the main sources of influence for Baal worship.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Elijah was to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. In this instruction, it was made patently clear that Elijah was not the only true follower of the LORD in Israel. So, from the hands of these three men, the necessity of judging idolatry and ridding the nation of Baal worshippers would be completed. When all of this was over, a remnant would be preserved of those who had never bowed the knee to Baal, or whose lips had not kissed his image.

As we have looked at 1 Kings 19, I trust that we have learned that the Lord does not want us to be defeated and dejected servants and disciples. We have seen how Elijah was restored after his mistaken ideas that his mission to bring Israel out of idolatry had completely failed and he was cast down into loneliness. If we are sure that we are following the Lord, in sincerity and truth, then we will trust Him to work His purposes out in His time. We, too, need to be faithful to His word, and to walk in the power of the Spirit, in fellowship with those who are redeemed, and who also seek to walk in faith along a path that is pleasing to Him.

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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