

## PROPHET ELIJAH

Prophet Elijah comes from Tishbe in Gilead. Elijah's story is found in the chapters from 1 Kings 17:1 to 2 Kings 2:1. Largely, the life and ministry of Elijah centers around Ahab, the king of Israel, and Jezebel, his foreign wife.

Elijah stood up boldly for God in a time when idolatry had swept his land. In fact, his name means, "My God is Yahweh". The false god he opposed was Baal, the favorite deity of Jezebel, wife of King Ahab of Israel. Under God's guidance, Elijah struck a heavy blow against the evil of false gods. He was an instrument for miracles against Israel's idolaters.

Elijah is first mentioned in Scripture when he declares to King Ahab that a severe drought would begin immediately to test Israel and its leadership. "Elijah ... said to Ahab, 'As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word'" (1 Kings 17:1).

Withholding rain for three and a half years was the first miracle God did through the prophet. This would bring severe famine throughout the kingdom. Elijah was asked by God to move to the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan, where ravens brought him bread and meat. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to live with a widow in Zarephath. God performed another miracle there, blessing the oil and flour - the last of what the woman had, so it did not run out until the end of the drought. Unexpectedly, the widow's son died. God through Elijah restored the child's life.

### Showdown at Mount Carmel

Elijah's greatest public miracle involved a contest with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel. Elijah invited these false prophets and all Israel to a demonstration to show that Baal had no power at all against the God of Israel. The outcome would demonstrate who served the true God (1 Kings 18:19-40).

To show God's power, Elijah told the large crowd, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" (1 Kings 18:22). Elijah continued, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). God would give convincing proof that day that He was Israel's only true God.

So the contest commenced. Throughout the day, the false prophets called on their god to send down fire and consume an animal sacrifice—but to no avail.

At the end of the day, Elijah called on Israel's God to send fire to swallow up the sacrifice prepared for Him. God responded to Elijah's prayer. In a moment thousands witnessed the fire from heaven consume the carcass, all the water in the trench and all the wet wood, burning up even the stones!

Elijah exposed the deception of the false prophets of Baal and at last the hearts of the Israelites were convinced that only Israel's God could do this miracle. Elijah then ordered that the false prophets be executed (1 Kings 18:36-40). Then God's Spirit moved Elijah to pray that it would rain; and the rains came, ending the terrible drought (1 Kings 18:42-45)

When the false prophets of Baal were dead, Elijah came under a death threat by Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab. As Israel's queen, she brought the worship of her god Baal into the nation, influencing King Ahab to worship Baal and set up idols in Israel (1 Kings 16:31; 1 Kings 21:25-26). But that experience was followed by an episode of fear and failure in Elijah's life: the prophet was afraid and ran for his life from Queen Jezebel. The reason is made clear in 1 Kings 19:1-2: "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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.'"

This death threat caused Elijah to flee a day's journey into the wilderness (1 Kings 19:4). At one point Elijah was so discouraged that he desired to die: "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'" (verse 4).

In response, the Lord sent an angel to bring the prophet food and drink both before and after slept. After the rest and nourishment, Elijah took a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb to meet with the Lord (1 Kings 19:6-8). God reassured Elijah and sent him back again to face King Ahab. Elijah was to deliver the message that Ahab and Jezebel would both die a humiliating death because of all the wicked deeds they refused to repent of (1 Kings 21:20-24).

### **Naboth's Vineyard**

(1 Kings 21) There was a man named Naboth and he had a vineyard in Jezreel that Ahab, king of Samaria, wanted. The vineyard was close to King Ahab's palace and he wanted to grow a vegetable garden. King Ahab told Naboth that he would either give him more, better land to replace it or pay him money for it. Naboth refused, saying "The Lord forbid that I give my inheritance of my fathers to you!" and King Ahab went back to his house pouting. King Ahab was laying in his bed upset and turned his face away, and would not eat. His wife, Jezebel, asked him what was so wrong that he wouldn't even eat. King Ahab told her that he wanted Naboth's vineyard and he even offered money or a different vineyard for it. "Well, are you the king or aren't you?" Jezebel replied. "Get out of bed, cheer up, and eat. I will get you Naboth's vineyard!"

Then she wrote some letters, signed Ahab's name to them, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the officials and leading citizens of Jezreel. the letters said: "Proclaim a day of fasting, call the people together, and give Naboth the place of honor. Get a couple of scoundrels to accuse him to his face of cursing God and the king. Then take him out of the city and stone him to death."

The officials and leading citizens of Jezreel did what Jezebel had commanded. they proclaimed a day of fasting, called the people together, and gave Naboth the place of honor. The two witnesses publicly accused him of cursing God and the king, and so he was taken outside the city and stoned to death. The message was sent to Jezebel: "Naboth had been put to death."

As soon as Jezebel received the message, she told Ahab to take the land since Naboth was dead. Ahab had barely set foot on the property when he was confronted by Elijah. The prophet cried out, "Have you killed and also taken possession?..Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood" (1 Kings 21:19)... "Also concerning Jezebel, the Lord

said, the dogs shall eat her body in the city of Jezreel. Any of your relatives who die in the city will be eaten by dogs and any who die in the open country will be eaten by vultures." (1 Kings 21:23-24)

When King Ahab heard the words from Elijah, he fasted and put on sackcloth, humbled himself before God, so God forgave King Ahab. But the punishment due to Jezebel and to the house of Ahab was still to come.

### **The significance of these events**

The two incidents mentioned above give us a clear picture of God's dealings with His people. While these incidents fill us with hope in God's justice, they invite us to share in God's mission of bringing His justice to the world, like Elijah did.