

1 Kings 19:4-8, Ps 34:1-8, Eph 4:25-52, John 6:35, 41-52

When we read some of the stories of the demonstrations of God's power in the Old Testament we can feel very small and insignificant in comparison. Elijah was probably the greatest of the OT Prophets. In the NT it was Elijah who, with Moses, was sent by the Lord our God to encourage Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration.

Elijah was used by God to raise the dead. He was a Brave man - a prophet of God at a time when people did not want to hear God's word.

He spoke God's Word to the ten northern tribes of Israel at a time when they had turned their back on the Lord our God and were worshipping the fertility gods, the Baals the Canaanite Gods of rain and fire.

In Canaanite religion each community had its own local god or Baal which they believed controlled the fertility of the crops, herds and families. Baal worship involved lascivious practices and child sacrifice. It was often linked with worship of the

goddess Ashtoreth and use of an Asherah pole - perhaps a wooden image of the goddess.

The Lord had warned the Israelites when they went into the Promised Land to destroy the Baal shrines and cut down the Asherah poles.

But King Ahab and his wife Queen Jezebel had led the ten northern tribes of Israel away from God. He had a powerful army and was king for 22 years but he oppressed the poor and stole their land. His wife Jezebel organized the killing of any prophets who were loyal to the Lord. [1 Kings 16:30, 21:25]

The Lord our God sent Elijah to confront King Ahab and to announce a drought that would devastate the nation. For three years there was no rain the fields and the crops failed. The King was desperate, the prophets of Baal prayed and sacrificed to Baal but Baal could not send rain. The King was frantic and hunted for Elijah but The Lord hid him away and cared for him in Miraculous ways.

After three years The Lord sent Elijah to King Ahab again with the message; [1 Kings 18:1]

"I the God of Israel will send rain on the Land".

The Lord had shown that Baals did not control the fertility of the Land.

The Baals should not be worshipped because the earth is the Lords and everything in it.

Full of Faith Elijah spoke to Ahab and called for a competition to demonstrate who was the God who could send fire and rain.

The competition was to be between Elijah the prophet of Yahweh, the God of all the earth and 450 prophets of Baal who claimed to be the god of nature and fire.

Two sacrifices were to be prepared;

One on the Altar of Baal

One on the Altar of the Lord

The fires were not to be lit.

Which God would send fire to consume the sacrifice Baal or Yahweh, The Lord our God?

They gathered on Mt Carmel and people from all over Israel came to witness; the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on one side and Elijah alone on the other. It looked very unbalanced but Elijah came in the name of the Lord our God.

Elijah addressed the Assembled people of Israel;

"How long will you waver between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow Him

But if Baal is God follow him."

But the people said nothing.

No support How hard it is to stand alone
Was it fear of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel?

The Prophets of Baal chose first which bull to sacrifice. They arranged the wood and the bull on the altar and from morning till noon prayed for Baal to send fire. "O Baal answer us," they shouted as they danced around the altar.

At noon Elijah taunted them,

**"Shout Louder, perhaps your god is asleep, or
busy or in deep thought."**

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears until the blood flowed.

After a few more hours of this it was evident that the Baals were not going to send fire.

About 3 p.m. Elijah invited people to come near.

Elijah repaired the broken down altar of the Lord and dug a trench around it and arranged the wood on the altar and the parts of the sacrificed bull. He told the people to pour water on the sacrifice, the wood and the altar until it was thoroughly wet and the trench was filled with water.

Then Elijah prayed; [1 Kings 18:36b-37]

"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

Answer me, O Lord, so that these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again."

It was a simple request and The Lord our God showed his people that it was He who was God.

The fire from God fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and water.

The people cried out;

"The Lord He is God. The Lord He is God."

The People took the 450 prophet of Baal down the mountain and killed them.

The Lord had sent fire, would he also send the rain? Elijah went to the top of Mt Carmel and prayed determinedly seven times for the longed for rain to refresh the ground. What an amazing example of a faithful servant of God!

Elijah warned King Ahab to go home quickly because the rain was coming.

Ahab went home in his chariot and told his wife what had happened on the mountain.

How do you think she reacted? Did she see the error of her ways and repent? Did she recognize that The Lord is God and thank Him for the rain? No! She made a vow to kill Elijah that same day!

Even powerful demonstrations of God's power and love don't persuade people who have hardened their hearts against The Lord. Our Lord Jesus used the power of God to bless those in need out of compassion. But he refused to use his power to prove his authority to those who doubted.

When Elijah heard of Queen Jezebel's threat to kill him he ran away. God's prophet travelled until he was exhausted and lay down under a Broom tree. Elijah had bravely stood alone for God before a rebellious nation. Elijah was a true Hero of the faith! His prophecy of drought had proved true. He had shown that Yahweh, the Lord, is the God who could send fire and rain.

But our OT reading shows us the very human picture of a man physically & mentally exhausted. He felt a failure, at his wits end.

What did this great man of God pray for?

Elijah did not pray to be filled with courage and energy, he prayed that he might die [v3-5].

He was a hunted man, lonely and exhausted. BUT he prayed. In his desperation when he could not face any more. He ran BUT he ran to God and he prayed.

There may be times in our life when we can't offer God any victories, when we feel discouraged and dispirited. Even in those times we can let our desperate cries come to the Lord our God. We see these types of prayer in the Psalms.

Elijah prayed. The Lord knew Elijah's situation & how he felt about it. He knows us too. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our needs. He doesn't always give us what we ask for. It is very encouraging for us to see how Y' deals kindly with Elijah.

No rebuke, No "try harder", no "do better".

Under the shade under a broom tree, Elijah slept, and woke with the smell of a fire & fresh baked bread. Food and drink, and an angel with gentle encouragement to eat. More sleep, more food and drink. All he needed to see him safely on his way to Horeb, the mountain of God. We see how very gracious our God is.

The Lord knows our needs and we can be sure that he wants us to care for our bodies, enough sleep and food. He cares for us as he cared for Elijah

Elijah in his desperation ran away. But he knows he does not have to run from God. Nourished and refreshed he finds shelter on the Mountain of God in a cave. He is honest with God about his feelings!

He couldn't make sense of it!

He has done everything that God has asked but Ahab is still King, Jezebel still wants to kill him.

Elijah felt so alone and vulnerable.

He tells God his pain. At times because of our personal circumstances we wonder,

"Why is this happening to me?"

In our national and church life we ask,

"Why do people turn away from God?"

In the cave at Horeb The Lord spoke to Elijah,

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The Lord tells Elijah to go outside, for the Lord will pass by - **Yes! a new vision of God!**

How will the Lord reveal himself.

A Wind - a tornado picking up rock

- God wasn't in the wind

An Earthquake shaking the earth

- God wasn't in the earthquake

Fire - powerful and consuming

- God wasn't in the Fire

The gentle whisper, the still small voice again

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The same question!

Not a rebuke, maybe a gentle challenge.

Elijah is feeling sorry for himself and he tells his story. **"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."**

But Elijah didn't have the full picture.

Often when we are feeling sorry for ourselves it is because we are not taking into account all the facts. The story of Elijah lets us know that it is OK to take our grumbles to God. Jesus also invites us;

**"Come to me all you who are heavy laden and
I will give you rest for your souls."**

The Lord who had answered Elijah's prayer with fire was gentle with his servant when Elijah found himself in despair. The LORD spoke to Elijah.

"You are not finished yet Elijah I have new work for you to do -

Anoint Hazael to be the new king of Syria

Anoint Jehu to be the new king for Israel

Elisha will continue your prophetic work.

Though no one spoke up to support you there are 7,000 others in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

What an encouragement to us to take our problems and discouragements to God. He is gentle with us. He meets us where we are and is always ready to forgive and restore us.