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God's Good News Story

Elijah: The Man Who Ran a Marathon & Never Died

The last few weeks we have been talking about the life and lessons from the first three Kings of Israel from the time from approximately 1050-930BC. Roughly a 120 year period. About 55 to 60 years after Solomons death we find ourselves in the midst of a divided Israel. 10 Tribes to the north called Israel and 2 tribes to the south called Judah.

So around the year 874BC a new King called began to reign in the northern kingdom of Israel and reigned for about 22 years. In the nearly 60 years since Solomon's death, Israel had gone down a sad and disobedient path of worshipping false gods and turning their backs on Yahweh, the true God. God began to send various prophets to warn Israel and try to get them to turn back, Ahijah and Jehu tried, but it was Elijah that is the most impactful and important. As the title teases us, he literally ran a distance close to a 26 mile marathon, and even though I don't go into this part of the story, Elijah is one of only two people listed in the Bible who apparently never died. (Not counting Jesus, who actually died and was resurrected). Enoch was one, and Elijah at the end of his life was taken up in a fiery chariot to heaven). What a dramatic closure to a dramatic servant of God.

We first find Elijah in 1 Kings 17. He is called a 'Tishbite' a settler from Gilead. Which according to

moist scholars is located on the eastern side of the Jordan in modern day Jordan. See map that follows...



God calls Elijah to confront the evil King Ahab (who you may know better as the husband of the infamous Jezebel). Ahab had followed in the footsteps of a previous King, Solomon, who allowed his foreign, pagan wives to lead him from the true worship of Yahweh. Ahab, let Jezebel influence him to sell out to the worship of Bel/Baal, a god of the Canaanites.

Elijah boldly approaches Ahab and tells him that God is going to bring about a severe drought in the region for a period of years. Then Elijah quickly leaves and crossed back over the Jordan to his homeland and settlers in the wilderness by a brook called Cherith. He is all alone there and the Bible states that ravens brought him food for him to survive. But in time the drought takes away all the water, so God tells him to cross back over the Jordan and go northwest to the village of Zarephath in the area of Sidon. Where another miraculous event by God takes place. The widow that he meets there is actually preparing a last meal for her and son of oil and flour and then be ready to die of starvation after that.

But God tells Elijah to tell her to make him some bread and that God would provide a miracle and the oil and bread would continue to flow until the rains and new harvest come. That is just what happened. But then a terrible thing happened that widow's young son died. But God preforms another miracle through Elijah. Elijah brings the young boy upstairs and lays him on the bed and then prays to God who then brings the boy back to life! After about three years of the drought. God calls Elijah to confront Ahab with a proposal to prove Who the True God is. They meet at **Mt. Carmel** and Elijah tells Ahab to gather the 450 false prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah for a showdown with God.

Listen to what the Bible says in **1 Kings 18:20-24**...

²⁰ So Ahab sent orders among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long are you going to struggle with the two choices? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him so much as a word. ²² Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left as a prophet of the LORD, while Baal's prophets are 450 men. ²³ Now have them give us two oxen; and have them choose the one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people replied, "That is a good idea."

So, the contest commences. Elijah tells the false prophets to go first. As you might imagine, it did not go as planned for the false prophets, they cried, prayed, danced and cut themselves for hours and their cries fell on deaf or dead ears.

Finally, as evening came, Elijah said enough. He took 12 stones, and the people helped him rebuild an altar to Yahweh. Then, just to show God's power, he dug a ditch or moat around the altar and poured buckets of water on the sacrifice. They did this three times. The wood and the animal sacrifices were drenched wet.

Then it happened, Elijah prayed, and God showed up in a mighty way.

1 Kings 18:36-40...³⁶ *Then at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet approached and said, "LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that You, LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back." ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood, and the stones and the dust; and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God!" ⁴⁰ Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slaughtered them there.*

The power of a faithful servant... it worked then, and we read in the New Testament, actually references this miracle of Elijah and the one that follows it...

James 5:13-18... *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."*

That last verse sets us up for what followed in the previous passage from Elijah and the Mt. Carmel Bonfire & slaughter. Remember evil King Ahab had put his hope in the false gods of Baal and Asherah. They had failed miserably and were now all dead. I'm sure he sat there in despair, shock, and a mixture of fear and anger. It was then that Elijah stepped up boldly and in faith told Ahab, you better get your chariot and run like the wind, because a flooding rain is coming. Now remember, three years had gone by since Elijah, under the direction of God and prophesied that there would be no rain until God decided. It was time, a little cloud formed over the nearby sea, and grew and grew until it became a massive rain front.

Ahab, high-tailed it back to Jezreel which was around 20-30 miles, according to which route you take. Now, Elijah is my kind of man, he was an minister of God but also a track star. The Bible says that... ⁴⁶ ***Then the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he belted his cloak around his waist and outran Ahab to Jezreel.***

In fact, Elijah, under the power of God, outran Ahab and his horse drawn chariot over a distance relatively equal to a Marathon... @26 miles. What a man, actually, what a Great God, who empowered a faithful servant.

Elijah was patient, faithful, bold, a man of prayer, and a man of action. He was willing to serve God and be empowered by God spiritually, emotionally, morally, and physically.

What a great man of prayer & faithful action. BUT.... There's always a BUT... unfortunately ...In 1 Kings 19 we read that King Ahab's wife Jezebel must have not been there for the bonfire and slaughter. But when she heard about it, she was not frightened and confused like Ahab, she came unhinged. She said Elijah, by this time tomorrow if I don't take your life like you did my prophets may the gods do to me the same. She threatened this might man of faith AND... he crumbled... Yep... You've probably heard the old saying "*Hell have no fury like a woman scorned*"...

Elijah ran like a scared cat into the wilderness. Then he acted like a pitiful little child and said to God, Just take my life God for I am no better than my forefathers. He had a major PITY PARTY.

Well, thankfully, God is merciful and patient when we most need Him to be. He sent an angel to wake up Elijah, bake him some bread and then sent him off on a 40 day journey. It's not like he didn't just run a 20+ mile race, now he has a 40-day ultra-marathon.

Elijah finally reached his destination and crawled into a mountain cave and waited. God asked him a question that many of us need to listen to and respond, God said **"Elijah, what are you doing here?"**

There were probably more than one reason for that question, but in essence God was asking Elijah to re-evaluate his faith, calling and response.

To come to a conclusion Elijah, chose to reaffirm his faith and service to God and carried on with a great ministry.

Let's sum this up with a few Take-Aways...

1. **Elijah was fearlessly dedicated to God.** His devotion made him a bold spokesman for what was right (1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 1:3-4). Instructions about where to go and what to do came from his relationship with God (1 Kings 17:2-6, 19:9-18). God knew the best plan for Elijah's life, how He could best use him, and what would bring the fulfillment of his destiny.

2. **Elijah was a great man of prayer and active response.**

Here is a quote from J. Hampton Keathley, III

Lessons from Elijah During Times of Testing (crosswalk.com)
<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/lessons-from-elijah-during-times-of-testing.html>

"Elijah forms a fitting example of the power of prayer, but effective and meaningful prayer is never an isolated religious exercise, something unrelated to the rest of a person's spiritual life and walk with God. The prayer that accomplishes things and gets God's ear, is the outflow of a vital relationship with God. It is born of one's burden, concern, and the reality of God in one's life. It flows from a sense of need, a heart full of faith, and from the desire to see God's purposes accomplished and His glory manifested." - J. Hampton Keathley III

3. **Elijah experienced Spiritual and Emotional Highs as well as great Lows, but, he always came back to a deep faith and trust in God.**

We will go through ups and downs, joys and sorrows in our life. That is just the way it is in this fallen world, But, we must choose like Elijah, to pray, trust, gird up our clothes and run in faith for God. If you fall down in faith get up and keep going, just keep going in faith and the power of God. There is a victory medal ahead for those of us who run the race and finish the course. Listen to this verse from Paul as he neared the end of his life,...

2 Timothy 2:7,8...

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who crave His appearing".

Let's be faithful to the end... Remember!

Start Strong, Finish Strong