

The Story of Elijah in the Bible

The Bible story of Elijah is found in the Old Testament, in the first book of Kings chapters 17 and 18. Elijah's story begins by introducing the state of affairs for the people of Israel. They had been governed by kings for numerous years and several of these kings had been evil. God was troubled with what the people were experiencing and he delivered his prophet, Elijah, to guide them out of corruption and suffering.

Before Elijah actually arrives in Israel, God sends a drought as he is so displeased with the people. Elijah had been residing out in the desert where there was a river with drinking water and God had sent ravens to bring him food. Eventually, the river also dries up and God instructs Elijah to go to the home of a widow who will provide him with food. When Elijah comes to the town of Zarephath, he sees the widow and asks her to get him some water and bread. She replies that she only has a small amount of flour and oil and is collecting sticks so she can cook this last portion of bread as the last meal for her son and herself. Elijah assures her that God will not allow their food to diminish until the rain returns. The widow trusts in Elijah and their food lasted until it rained again. Sometime later, the widow's son became ill and passed away. The widow was very troubled, believing that Elijah was the reason for this tragedy. Though Elijah was blamed by the widow, he attempted to bring the boy back to life by praying to God. In a miraculous event, God heard Elijah and answered his prayers, and brought the boy back to life. When Elijah returned the boy to his mother, the woman could recognize that Elijah was a man of God and was amazed.

The story continues as Elijah confronts the evil king, Ahab, about being the cause of problems for the people of Israel. Elijah challenges Ahab to a demonstration of his deity, Baal, versus the God of Elijah at Mount Carmel. The challenge is to offer sacrifices to their respective deities and see which starts a fire to prove their divinity. Ahab's prophets pray for hours to Baal but nothing happens. When it is Elijah's turn he boldly drenches the sacrament with water to display his supreme trust in God to start a fire despite being wet. Then Elijah began to pray:

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

God then sent down a fire that completely engulfed the sacrament in flames and the people of Israel rejoiced with a newfound faith in God. The fire was followed by rain

ending the long drought, further showing God's grace. The Israelites lost faith in Ahab and followed Elijah's guidance in trusting and recognizing God's sovereignty.

Why Did the Prophet Elijah Never Die?

There are many great prophets in the Old Testament, but one is considered the greatest. [Elijah](#) was a prophet who stood for God despite huge obstacles, performed dramatic miracles, and became a symbol of the role that [John the Baptist](#) would fill ("Elijah must come first..."). Despite the many powerful moments in Elijah's life, he also had times of doubt and struggle, making him one of the more complex Old Testament figures. Here's an overview of this fascinating man's life.

Who Was Elijah in the Bible?

Elijah was a prophet of Israel during the Old Testament period. He first appears in [1 Kings 17:1](#) and is described as a "Tishbite in Gilead," a region of Israel referenced earlier in places like [Genesis 31:21](#)–22 and [Judges 10:4](#).

Like most prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, Elijah's job involved condemning sinful leaders and foretelling the punishments that God would bring if people didn't repent. His first appearance is telling King Ahab of Israel that because he has turned Israel to false gods, a drought will cover the land. The drought ended seven years later with a dramatic showdown between Elijah and 850 pagan priests. As detailed in the next section, Elijah went through a period of discouragement after things didn't go quite as he expected following this big success.

After these dramatic events, Elijah took on a disciple, [Elisha](#). Elijah continued to speak out against Ahab on at least one occasion when he had someone murdered. He also spoke out against Ahab's successor, Ahaziah. Sometime after Ahaziah's death, Elijah passed his title on to Elisha...in a particularly dramatic way.

What Are Some of Elijah's Most Famous Moments?

[Elijah's life](#) had many great moments worth exploring. The most famous ones are arguably the following:

Raising a boy back to life ([1 Kings 17](#)). After speaking out against Ahab, Elijah spent seven years in hiding, much of it staying with a widow and her son in the Sidonian town Zarephath. During this period, the widow's son died of illness and Elijah prayed for the boy to come back to life. After Elijah prayed and touched the boy three times, he came back to life.

Fire on Mount Carmel ([1 Kings 18](#)). After seven years of drought, Elijah had King Ahab bring the 450 priests of Baal and 400 priests of Asherah to Mount Carmel. There, he issued a challenge: built an altar and see which god set it on fire. After many hours

of the pagan priests trying to get a response from Baal, Elijah built his altar. To make things more interesting, Elijah covered his altar with water after he built it. After praying to God, fire came from heaven and lit Elijah's water, even making the water burn. To top the event off, Elijah had all the priests of Baal killed.

Meeting God at Mount Horeb ([1 Kings 19](#)). After Elijah had shown God's power on Mount Carmel and killed all the prophets of Baal, Ahab's wife Jezebel planned to have him killed. Elijah fled into the desert and prayed for his death. Instead, an angel appeared multiple times and gave him food. Ultimately, Elijah reached Mount Horeb, and God spoke to him, giving him new tasks and generally making it clear that he wasn't finished with Elijah yet.

Condemning Ahab for Naboth's death ([1 Kings 21](#)). Despite having gone through a national drought for disobeying God and seeing God's power in a dramatic way on Mount Carmel, Ahab apparently didn't learn to behave better. After those events, Ahab tried to get a neighbor, Naboth, to sell him a vineyard to use as a vegetable garden. When Naboth didn't take Ahab's offer, Jezebel had him killed and Ahab took over the vineyard. Elijah came and condemned Ahab, prophesying his death and the destruction of his family line. Ahab repented and God decided to hold off the family line's destruction for a generation.

Calling down fire on soldiers ([2 Kings 1](#)). When Ahab was succeeded by Ahaziah, Elijah used an intermediary to condemn Ahaziah's seeking pagan gods for advice about whether he would survive an illness. In response, Ahaziah sent 50 troops to collect Elijah, who called down fire from heaven to kill them. Another set of 50 troops were sent, Elijah called down fire from heaven again. When the third set of 50 troops arrived, the captain begged Elijah for mercy. Elijah sought God's advice and went with the troops, meeting Ahaziah on his deathbed. Elijah repeated the message that he had given through the intermediary, and Ahaziah died shortly afterward as punishment for not trusting God.

There is one last important moment in Elijah's life, which came at the end.

What Happened at the End of Elijah's Life?

1 Kings ends with the death of Ahab, and 2 Kings starts with the story of Elijah calling down fire. After that, Elijah apparently got a message that God was going to "take him away," which other prophets also knew. Elijah and Elisha traveled to Gilgal, then to Bethel, Jericho, and finally to the Jordan River. As they traveled, Elijah repeatedly told Elisha to stay behind while he went on to somewhere God had called him ([1 Kings 2:1,4,6](#)), with Elisha always replying, "As surely as the Lord lives and you live, I will not leave you." On two occasions, they met other prophets who warned Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" ([2 Kings 2:3](#), 5). Both times, Elisha replied he did know, but asks them not to speak about it.

Finally, at the Jordon, Elijah made the water part, and the two men walked across. On the other side, Elijah asked Elisha, “what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” ([2 Kings 2:9](#)). Elisha asked to inherit a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, which Elijah said was difficult but, “if you see when I am taken from you, it will be yours” ([2 Kings 2:10](#)).

Then, a chariot of fire pulled by fiery horses appeared, coming between Elijah and Elisha. Elijah went up in the chariot in a whirlwind, and Elisha yelled, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” ([2 Kings 2:12](#)). Elisha then took the cloak Elijah had used to part the water, went back to the Jordon, and made the water part in the same way that Elijah did ([2 Kings 2:14](#)).

Why Didn't Elijah Die?

The Bible doesn’t explicitly give any reason why Elijah was taken directly into heaven, any more than it gives for why [Enoch was taken up to heaven](#). There are debates among Revelation scholars about whether both men will eventually die. Specifically, the argument goes that since [Hebrews 9:27](#) says that all humans must die once, Elijah and Enoch are the two witnesses mentioned in [Revelation 11:3-12](#) who come at the End Times, get killed, and then return to heaven.

It is worth noting that Enoch is commended in [Hebrews 11:5](#) for his great faith. While Elijah seems to have doubted God’s protection after Mount Carmel, that doesn’t necessarily mean he didn’t have great faith. He continued to serve God well after that and passed on his learning to Elisha.

In the end analysis, it may be best to admit we aren’t sure why Elijah received this honor, but that it shows us something encouraging. The fact that God honored Elijah in spite of his doubts reminds us that in the end, God will decide our legacies. Being fallible human beings, we will all struggle. We will not always live “the victorious Christian life” we see in inspirational stories. Regardless of our struggles, doubts, or mistakes, God loves us and uses us in unexpected ways.

1 Kings 17

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:

3 “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.

4 You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.

6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him:

9 “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”

10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?”

11 As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

12 “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.’ ”

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.

18 She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

19 “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.

20 Then he cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?”

21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

22 The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.

23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!”

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”

1 Kings 18

1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.”

2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,
3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD.

4 While Jezebel was killing off the LORD’s prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)

5 Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals.”

6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”

8 “Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’ ”

9 “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?”

10 As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you.

11 But now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’

12 I don’t know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn’t find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth.

13 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.

14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, ‘Elijah is here.’ He will kill me!”

15 Elijah said, “As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.”

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

18 “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals.

19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

21 Elijah went before the people and said, “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.

22 Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.

23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.

24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.”

26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down.

31 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.”

32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time.

35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the 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.

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

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"

40 Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

43 "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

44 The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

45 Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

46 The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

2 Kings 2

Elijah Taken Up to Heaven

- 1** When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.
- 2** Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.
- 3** The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “so be quiet.”
- 4** Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.
- 5** The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” he replied, “so be quiet.”
- 6** Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on.
- 7** Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.
- 8** Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.
- 9** When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied.
- 10** “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.”
- 11** 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.
- 12** Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.
- 13** Elisha then picked up Elijah’s cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

14 He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

15 The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

16 “Look,” they said, “we your servants have fifty able men. Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.” “No,” Elisha replied, “do not send them.”

17 But they persisted until he was too embarrassed to refuse. So he said, “Send them.” And they sent fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him.

18 When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, “Didn’t I tell you not to go?”