

# Brother Watch

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## Elijah: In the Spirit

[This special issue of BrotherWatch is supplemental to New Life Fellowship's 2008 Men's Retreat.—Ed]

### Personal Application

As we examine the calling, character and career of the prophet Elijah, let us consider the personal application of his biblical example in our lives today? How do these Old Testament scriptures apply in a New Testament world? Prayerfully consider the following questions:

1. How does the prophet speak to you?
2. What might the Lord be saying to you through the prophet?
3. How are you called to act in your contemporary situation through God's inspiration?

4. What might God be saying to His people collectively through your way of acting, speaking or writing?

### Background

Elijah is the prototypical prophet of the Bible. His name, which proclaimed both his mission and his character, means "The Lord is my God."<sup>1</sup> His is an example of "uncompromising loyalty to God," for he sought true worship of the true God, worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

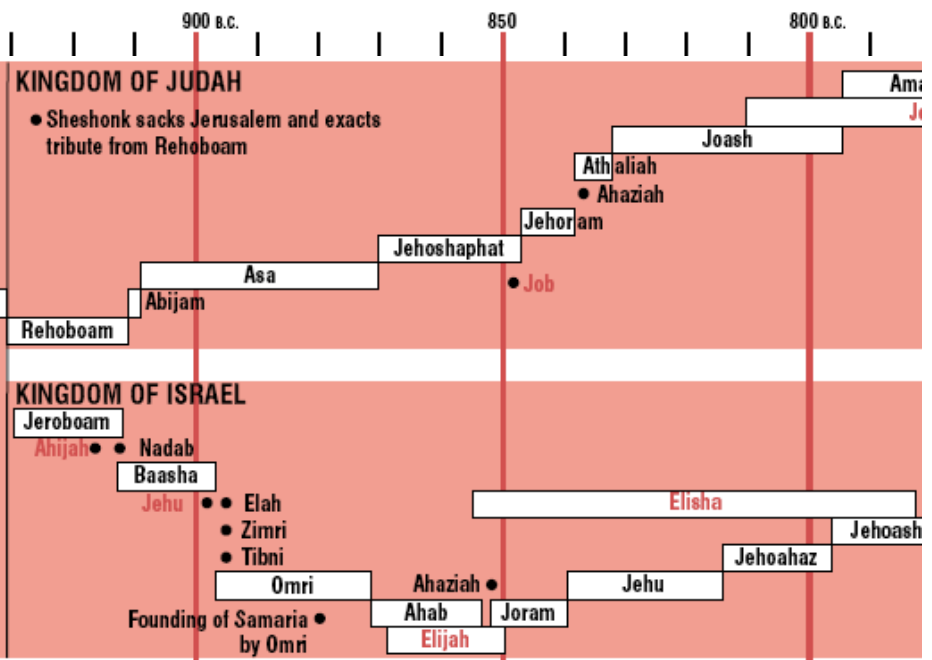
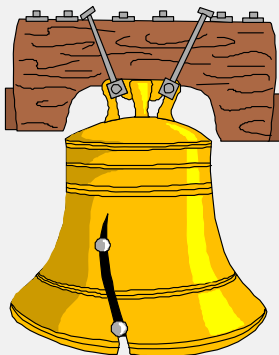
Elijah was from the small town of Tishbe in Gilead, yet God called him to continually confront the powerful and corrupt rulers of Israel. King Ahab and

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his wife, Jezebel, persecuted and killed the priests of God and established Baal worship as the *de facto* official religion of Israel. Elijah's life was "used to cause the collapse of Israel's spiritual apostasy."<sup>2</sup> Such was Elijah's impact that he and Moses appeared together with Jesus at His transfiguration (see Mark 9:1-13).

### Elijah's First Mission (865 BC)\*

1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 17

#### Elijah prophesied drought in Israel (v. 1)

Elijah literally appeared out of nowhere. We know nothing of his personal background or calling. We know only that he was from an obscure village in Gilead. Elijah's first appearance on the scriptural stage was to confront the most powerful man on earth, a ruler known for his wickedness. Elijah literally spoke truth to power.

Verse 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."

We see here that God was first and foremost in Elijah's life, giving him courage to face the powerful and entrenched adversaries of God. Elijah boldly proclaimed God's message to evil King Ahab.

#### Elijah fed by ravens at Brook Cherith (v. 2-7)

Then God commanded Elijah to go to the place of safety that He had prepared for him.

Verses 3-4 "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

Throughout these scriptural accounts of Elijah's life, we see that he instantly obeyed God. God said, "Go" and Elijah went. At Cherith, God provided protection for Elijah from Ahab's wrath. Elijah's place of refuge became his training ground. His life was hidden in God's just as he was "hidden from Ahab" and "honed



by isolation."<sup>4</sup> There, Elijah had "unbroken communion with God."<sup>3</sup>

#### Widow cared for Elijah in Zarephath (v. 8-16)

After the brook dried up, God led Elijah to a widow at Zarephath, to be tended to during the drought.

Verse 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

One striking aspect of Elijah's encounter with the widow is his assurance of how God would provide for them all. Another is his insistence that the widow tend to the things of God in faith before tending to her own needs.



\* All dating is approximate and provided to aid in the chronological narrative.

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Verses 13-14 And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’”

Through a continuing miracle, Elijah, the widow and her son were nourished with an unending supply of food and oil. Zarephath means “crucible” (noun) and “to refine” (verb), and Elijah was surely refined in the crucible of his experiences. At Cherith, Elijah was fed by unclean birds, while, in Zarephath, a destitute widow was his caretaker.

The daily bread provided by God is reminiscent of the manna he provided to the Israelites in the wilderness and the Bread of Life offered to us today (see John 6:32-35).

### **Elijah resurrected widow’s son (v. 17-24)**

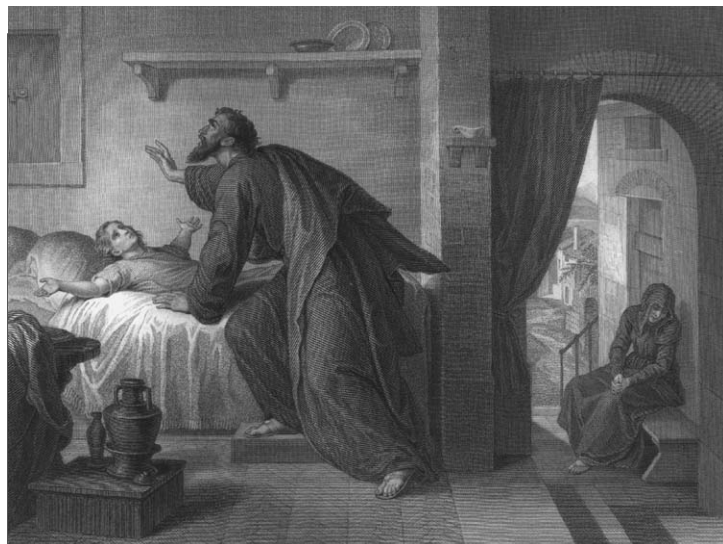
When the widow’s son died unexpectedly, Elijah’s prayer for his resurrection was answered. He did not hesitate to go to God.

Verses 21-22 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.” Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

Full of compassion, Elijah sought God’s mercy and He gave it—in a very intimate manner. Elijah demonstrated a heart at peace, gentleness, self-control, “undiminished faith” and humility.<sup>5</sup> This was the first recorded resurrection in scripture.

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

The widow’s response to this miracle? The widow appeared to take God’s daily miracles and providence for granted, yet “discovered” God’s providential care with the resurrection of her son.



While he was hidden in Him, God provided Elijah with private, intimate relationships with Himself and with the widow. God’s provision for this widow was a prelude to Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, to whom He spoke of living waters.

### **Elijah Confronted Prophets of Baal (861 BC)**

1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 18

#### **God instructed Elijah to confront Ahab (v. 1-2)**

Verses 1-2 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.” So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,

#### **Obadiah acted as a reluctant go-between (v. 3-16)**

Verses 3-4 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. 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.)

Verses 9-10 “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? 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

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claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you.

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

### **Elijah confronted Ahab (v. 17-19)**

Verses 17-19 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” “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. 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.”

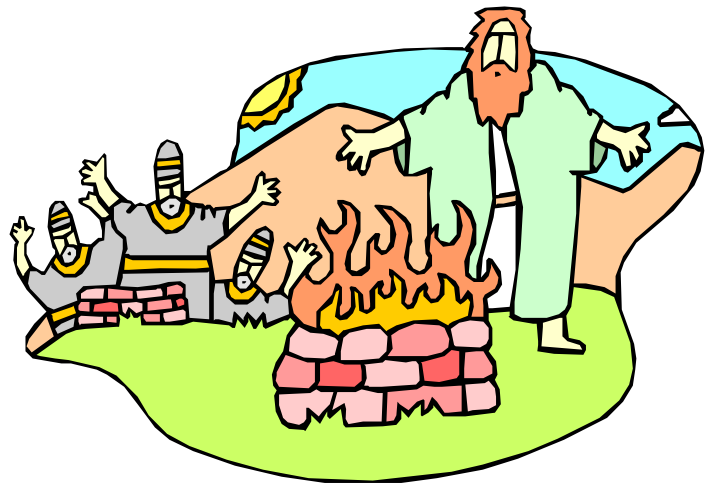
### **Mt. Carmel – false prophets vanquished (v. 20-40)**

In perhaps his most challenging and dramatic encounter, Elijah confronted King Ahab with a challenge from God – a contest to see whose deity was more powerful. Elijah issued his famous question to the people of Israel:

Verse 21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word.

Having mocked Baal and Asherah, whose silence deafened the ears and dismayed the hearts of their believers, Elijah offered his own sacrifice in seemingly impossible conditions and offered his simple prayer to God:

Verses 36-38 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God,



and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.

God’s response to Elijah’s prayer was instantaneous. Before the assembled people of Israel, the false priests were exposed as idolaters and were executed. God’s miracle of fire from heaven demonstrated the power and authority of the one true God.

### **God gave rain (v. 41-45)**



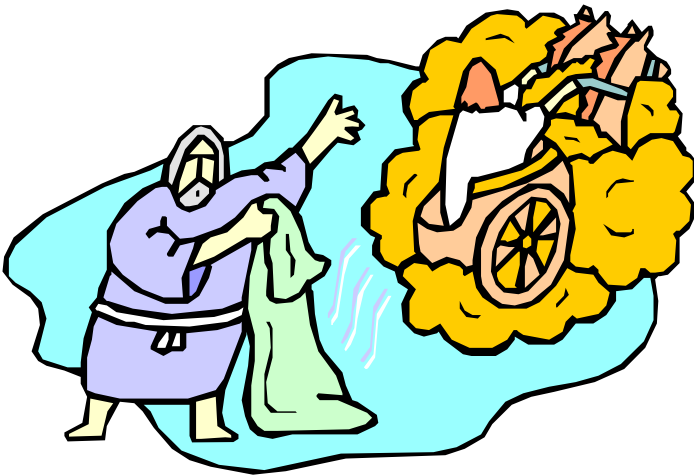
Verse 44 The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’”

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After 3 ½ years, following Elijah's seven-fold prayer, God blessed the land with rain. Elijah knew God would keep His word, yet he fervently prayed for that very outcome. His example was noted by the apostle James, who wrote: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:16-18)."

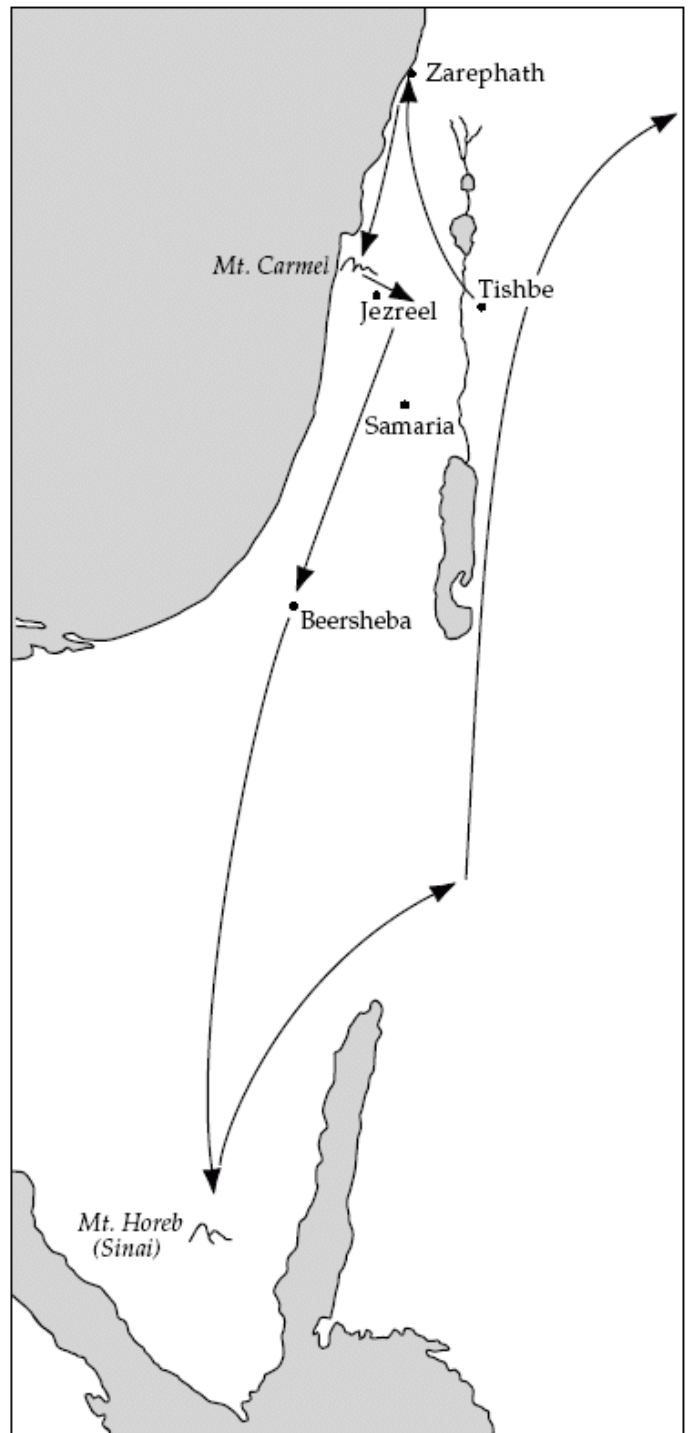
### **Elijah outraced Ahab (v. 46)**



In one of the more curious episodes in the holy canon, Elijah (on foot) outraced Ahab (in his chariot) to Jezreel.

Verse 46 Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

In our contemporary world, we are beset by a pantheon of false gods, from secular humanism (man) and environmentalism (creation) to materialism (wealth) and hedonism (pleasure). Moral and cultural relativism and historical revisionism deny God's truth. Modern notions of "tolerance" and political correctness deny the existence of God's absolute truths and the gospel of the one path to eternity. Elijah teaches us to "Never underestimate the power of one life totally dedicated to the Lord."<sup>6</sup> Through Elijah, God proclaimed His truth in astonishing ways.



### **Elijah Fled From Jezebel (861 BC)**

1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 19

On the heels of a great victory, Elijah quickly descended into despair. His courage quickly shriveled up. We see Elijah's humanity most vividly on display, reminding us that even the best of heroes sometimes has feet of clay.

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### **Jezebel threatened Elijah (v. 1-2)**

Verse 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

### **Elijah fled to Beersheba, entered wilderness (v. 3-4)**

Although Elijah had just witnessed and participated in a dramatic miracle, observed the people of Israel choose God over Baal, and slew the false prophets in the kingdom – and even though Elijah intimately knew the unparalleled power and personal providence of God – he still fell into a state of depression and dread at Jezebel’s threat on his life. Elijah fled in terror. Perhaps Jezebel’s naked, aggressive power in the face of Elijah’s victory confused him.

As Christian author Chuck Swindoll explained, “Elijah was not thinking realistically,” “had separated himself from relationships that strengthen,” “was caught in the aftermath of a great victory,” “was physically and emotionally spent,” and “submitted to the great beast Self-pity.”<sup>7</sup>

Elijah quickly descended from the mountaintop of victory in God to the valley of despair. But God would gently lift him up again.

### **Angel fed Elijah under a juniper tree (v. 5-8)**

Verses 5-8 Then as he 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.

### **A still small voice at Mt. Horeb (v. 9-18)**

According to the *New World Encyclopedia*: “Elijah escaped to Beersheba and was visited in the night by an angel, who offered him heavenly food for his flight

into the wilderness. Having partaken of the divine provision, he went forward on a forty day trek to Mount Horeb, a journey that numerically and thematically paralleled Noah’s forty day sojourn in the ark, Moses’ forty years of wandering in the desert, and Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness after baptism. Upon reaching the mountain, Elijah was visited by the Lord YHWH, who, significantly, appeared not in earthquakes or thunderstorms (in the manner of Baal), but in a “still, small voice.” This theophany teaches the inwardness of God’s voice, that believers should look for God not in the mighty power of nature but in their own conscience.”

“The word God spoke by that voice was pregnant with power: God would shake up the political order by having Elijah anoint Hazael as king over the Arameans (Syria), Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as his divinely chosen prophetic successor.”

God gave Elijah rest, refreshment, wise counsel, communion with Himself and a companion. God did not rebuke Elijah, though He did remind him of the existence of other devout followers of God.

### **Elisha called (v. 19-21)**

Verses 19, 21 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. ... Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

In our walk of faith, crises can loom large and, if our faith is not firmly fixed in Jesus, it can vanish. When we focus on the Author and Finisher of our faith, current circumstances can be viewed from the proper perspective. God’s Spirit gently reminds us of His presence, providence, and power.

### **Elijah’s Second Mission (856 BC)**

1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 21

### **Jezebel defrauded and killed Naboth (v. 1-16)**

Verse 7 Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

Verse 13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, “Naboth has cursed both God and the



king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.

Verse 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth’s vineyard.

### **Elijah prophesied against Ahab (v. 17-26)**

Verse 20 So Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” And he answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD.

### **Ahab repented; God relented (v. 27-29)**

Verses 27-29 So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

The *New World Encyclopedia* states, “After his return to human society, Elijah continued to attack and criticize the apostate reigns of Ahab and (later) his son, Ahaziah. Particularly in the affair of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21), Elijah stood for social justice and the rights of small landholders against royal prerogative.”

Remove the word “social” from “justice” and this statement is accurate. In this incident, Elijah was God’s voice for the voiceless, calling for liberty from oppressive rulers and declaring God’s heart for the plight of the poor.

Here we see both God’s compassion and eagerness to forgive along with the reality that there are consequences to evil. God forgave a repentant Nineveh and a repentant David, yet David also suffered the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba. (David’s sin, repentance and restoration preceded the poetic beauty of Psalm 51.)

### **Reign of Ahaziah (853-852 BC)**

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 1

Ahab died several years later. His son, Ahaziah, ruled for a brief time.

### **Ahaziah sought counsel of foreign gods (v. 1-2)**

Verse 2 Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, “Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.”

### **Elijah prophesied via messengers (v. 3-8)**

Verse 8 They replied, “He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.” The king said, “That was Elijah the Tishbite.”

### **The kings messengers killed (v. 9-12)**

Verse 10 Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

Verse 12 “If I am a man of God,” Elijah replied, “may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

Elijah twice called down fire from heaven to consume his adversaries. See Luke 9:52-55, where James and John, the Sons of Thunder, wanted Jesus to do the same.

### **Third group of messengers spared (v. 13-15)**

Verse 15 The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

### **Elijah prophesied against Ahaziah in person (v. 16)**

Verses 16 Then he said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’”

### **Ahaziah died as prophesied (v. 17-18)**

Verse 17 17 So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.

Nothing can stop God's will, though His compassionate mercy may alter it. His Word will have its way with our lives, to the delight of those who embrace it and to the terror of those who reject it.

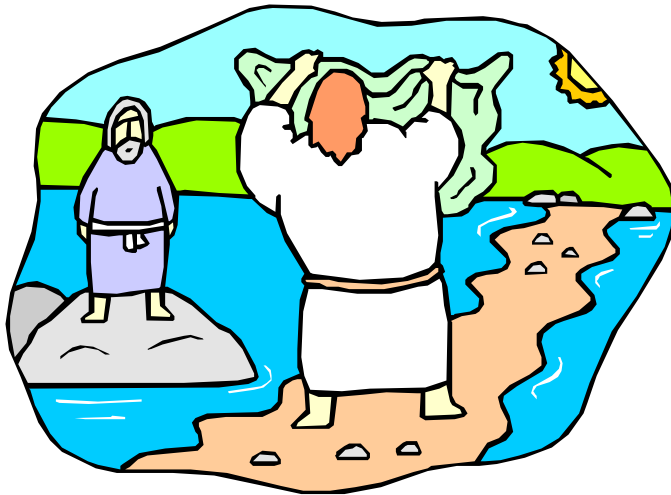
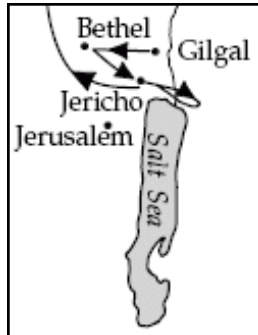
### Elijah Passed Baton to Elisha (852 BC)

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 2

#### Elijah prepared for his departure (v. 1-8)

Elisha loyally followed Elijah wherever he went. Elisha would not leave his mentor's side.

Verses 1-2 And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel.



#### Elijah taken up in a whirlwind (v. 9-12)

Verses 9-12 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah

went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.

#### Elisha assumed the prophetic duties (v. 13-15)

Verse 13 He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

#### Some Lessons

We can glean many lessons from the life and experiences of Elijah, among them:

- Remember the sovereignty, majesty and compassion of God.
- Without hesitation, do whatever God tells you to say or do.
- When a child of God steps out in faith to do His will, God will provide.
- God works through fallible people.
- God's power works wonders in willing lives.
- Great moments of faith can be followed by succumbing to areas of vulnerability.
- We should not presume to speak for God when there is no clear message from God.

#### Endnotes:

1. Charles Swindoll, *The Life and Times of Elijah*, Insight for Living, 1992, pg. 6.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 84.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 43.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.