

23 Elijah the Prophet

If you do any reading of the Bible, you will find information about people called "prophets". Who were the prophets?

A prophet....

- taught the people about God.
- told the people that they were disobeying God's laws
- told the people what will happen in the future
- may have been a leader

The Bible has details of many prophets, but this lesson looks at one of the most famous prophets: Elijah. The life of Elijah is in the Bible from 1 Kings 17.

Elijah lived about 800 years before Jesus Christ was born. At this time, God's people were ruled by kings; some kings were good and followed God, others were bad and followed idols- false gods made of wood or stone.

The results of King Ahab's evil ways

The king who ruled over Israel at the time of Elijah was very bad. If you look at 1 Kings 16:29-33 you can read about King Ahab and his evil wife.

These two people disobeyed God's laws and served an idol called Baal. God decided to punish King Ahab and Israel, and so He sent Elijah to Ahab with a message: there would be no more rain or dew on the land of Israel.

And so it was. There was no rain or dew for 3 years. Now the land of Israel does not get much rain, but it needs the dew to make plants grow. So if there was no dew, soon there would be no water anywhere. Without water there would soon be no food.

Even Elijah had to leave. God told him to go to a small stream in the mountains called Cherith. There would be no food for Elijah there. God looked after His servant the prophet. See what happened in 1 Kings 17:2-6.

Because there was no rain, the stream dried up. God then told Elijah to leave Israel and go to Zarephath and meet up with a widow there. When Elijah arrived there, he found that the poor woman had only enough food for one meal. Elijah promised the woman that her jar of flour and her jug of oil would not run out until rain came again. It was a miracle, and it was as Elijah said. All the time that Elijah lived there, God made sure there was food for the widow, her son and Elijah. You may read the full detail in verses 7 to 24.

Elijah faces King Ahab

All this time, King Ahab did not change his evil ways, but still served Baal. He searched all over the place to find Elijah and have him put to death. Now God told Elijah to go back to Ahab and show the people that God was the only God - not Baal.

There would be a contest on Mount Carmel to show the people who was God. King Ahab, the 450 prophets of Baal and all the people came to Mount Carmel on a certain day. The contest was simple. There would be two altars: one for God and one for Baal. The prophets of Baal would kill a bull and put it on the altar, and then call on their god Baal to set the bull on fire. Elijah would do the same with God's altar: kill a bull and call on God to set the bull on fire.

Whichever god answered would be the true god. All the people were happy that it was a fair contest. 1 Kings 18:23-24

The prophets of Baal went first. They killed the bull and placed it on the altar, and they shouted and cried all day, but nothing happened. There was no fire, no voice, no answer. Elijah teased them about how their god did not answer v27.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He killed the bull and placed it on the altar. Elijah knew how powerful God in heaven is. So he ordered that twelve jars of water be poured all over the altar. Everything was soaked with water: the dead bull, the altar, and the trench around the altar. You would know how hard it is to set fire to something that is wet! Elijah was really making it hard for God! But as the Bible shows us, nothing is impossible with God!

Elijah then prayed to God. You can read the prayer in verse 36-37. What happened next? God sent fire down from heaven, and the fire was so strong that it burned up the bull, the wood, the stones, the dirt and the water in the trench! Nothing was left. Verse 38.



The people saw all this, and bowed to the God of Israel. They killed the prophets of Baal, and Elijah prayed to God that the drought would end - that there would be rain on the land again. And the rain came.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel continue their evil ways

This great show of the power of God was not enough for some people. Queen Jezebel sent a message to Elijah that when she found him, she would kill him. Elijah was very frightened, and ran away to Mount Horeb, in the south of Israel. Elijah was depressed; he had failed to turn the people back to God. At Mount Horeb, God explained to His servant that it would take more than the fire to change the people. It would be the soft voice of teaching that would do it. And also, there were seven thousand people who had never worshipped Baal. So Elijah was not alone after all. Elisha, who was the next great prophet, joined Elijah.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were evil people. Next to Ahab's palace was a vineyard owned by a man called Naboth. Ahab wanted to buy the vineyard, but Naboth refused, saying that God had given the land to him. Ahab was sad and upset; when Jezebel heard about it, she said that she would get the vineyard for Ahab. Jezebel paid some people to lie about Naboth, and to say that he had cursed God. The town elders found Naboth guilty, and he was executed. Ahab then went to take the vineyard for himself.

However, as Ahab went into the vineyard, who was there? Elijah! Read what was said in 1 Kings 21:17-23. See the prophecy that Elijah made: King Ahab would bleed to death in the place where Naboth died. Dogs at the walls of the town of Jezreel would eat Queen Jezebel. If you want to see if the words came true, look at 1 Kings 22:37-38 and 2 Kings 9:30-37.

King Ahab regrets his evil past

What did Ahab do when he heard the words of Elijah? He was very sad, and he was very sorry for what he had done. Ahab was so evil, yet God was kind to him and said that Ahab could keep his kingdom until he died. It shows us how great our God is. No matter how bad we are, if we are sorry for what we have done, and we turn back to Him, He will forgive us.

What do we learn from Elijah? We learn how God cares for His people. When we might think we are all alone, God is always near us. If you have time, you may like to keep reading in 2 Kings and find out about Elisha the prophet, and the great things he did.