

Highlight Reel: Elijah

1 Kings 17-19

In this series, we will be reviewing familiar Biblical characters and stories, but citing the flaws as well as the strengths. God teaches readers through the example of strengths. God teaches the characters in the story by addressing the flaws, and by proxy addresses the same flaws in us.

The Backstory: Israel had split into 2 kingdoms after Solomon died. Neither one regarded Adonai much. They began worshipping other gods. There were several problems with this. First, they're not real. Also, they were all worshiped solely for personal material gain of some kind (fertility, crops, war, prowess, fighting). Worshiping them involved hurting yourself, your children, or strangers. And these false Gods, as the worshipers understood them, still reserved the right to hate you and your face and your pets and your pets faces and if you pets had pets that also had faces, they could hate them too.

The kings and other strong members of society turned their backs on God's laws; causing the following for everyone else: spread of disease, violence, general misery; as well as mistreatment of the poor, the widow, the alien, and generally anyone who was not protected directly by the king or a large family of armed people. Keep in mind this is ancient times. Might made you right, unless you knew Adonai. So there was a little more involved than waving hands at silly little statues. In that day, Adonai was considered **RADICALLY KIND** for a God.

This brings us to the start of our story. We find that Ahab, King of the northern kingdom has married a foreign princess, Jezebel, and because she has a major crush on BAAL, she's had all the prophets of Adonai that she can find killed, instituted 450 'prophets' of Baal, and set up Baal shrines to do bad things at, across the kingdom.

It is important to note, a prophet of Baal is a fortune teller. On the other hand, God's prophets prioritized calling out evil. Predicting the future wasn't predicting the future. It was relaying a promise from a real God. To God's prophets, it wasn't fortune telling, it was just delivering the mail: You ran up a tab on your evil. Here's the bill.

Elijah: Read 1 Kings 17:1-7. Elijah is established pretty well here. He's not afraid of Ahab. He calls Ahab out and states the consequence. God knows how Ahab will react, but God's not done with Ahab. Later, Ahab would repent for a while. So rather than wipe Ahab out, God instructed Elijah to hide out. Now Ahab was killing prophets when Eljah said this, so a strength of Elijah is courage.

So after the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to Sidon where a widow and her son took Elijah in when a miracle saved them from starving. Read 1 Kings 17:17-24.

Here, God resurrected someone for the First TIME. It's a Big Deal. This miracle wasn't performed to turn Israel back to God. It wasn't part of the story's narrative. It was just because Elijah asked. God understood Elijah's heart and respected it. He gave the gift of life, for Elijah.

Also, Elijah questioned, and God wasn't offended. Notice the prayer. He says "my God". and "have you also?". It was not an accusation of a bad occurrence. Not an angry "why?" It was, "*you are my God, did you do this, was this what you wanted, is this a needed catastrophe in the same way as Ahab's drought?*" It's ok to question things. God understands that it will happen. Where you can go wrong is when you step out of place and accuse because it didn't go your way.

Read 1 Kings 18:1-4. Summing a few verses after this bit, Ahab decides he and Obadiah need to each go survey a couple of spots for possible grass to keep their livestock alive. Then Obadiah spots Elijah coming, and Elijah says tell your master I'm here. Obadiah's first reaction is fear because come to find out, Ahab knows Obadiah saved God's prophets, so Obadiah is already in a bit of hot water. And Ahab has been looking everywhere for Elijah, and now Obadiah is afraid that if he comes back empty handed, Ahab will kill him.

I've included this passage because it's important to know that Elijah, Ahab, and Obadiah all know that there are 100 other prophets of Adonai in Israel. Elijah is not the only loyal party here. This is important for later.

Elijah & Baal's Prophets: Elijah meets Ahab then we arrive at the Fire Fall. Read 1 Kings 18:25-38.

Elijah arranges a test and succeeds in turning the people back to Adonai, at least for a time. Elijah's obvious strength here is faith. *Emunah*. Not a blind faith but a faith that God will do what he says he will do. Expecting that God intends good.

However, immediately following this, the prophets of Baal are killed, and Jezebel threatens Elijah's life when she finds out. Then Elijah flees. Why? Clearly God is on his side. Fire just fell...

Elijah in the Wilderness: Read 1 Kings 19:4-9a. He said, "Lord, take my life. I am no better than my fathers." Elijah perceived that he had failed. He saw the people turned, but Ahab and Jezebel did not change. Just as other prophets failed to turn the evil authorities, so had he. He had expected a different result.

Elijah didn't flee entirely out of fear. He fled for losing heart. He realized that his actions hadn't saved Israel. The miracle hadn't turned them back.

Elijah's flaw here is expectation...predicting God's results or God's timing. *Your expectations will always ruin your attitude faster than your reality*. But God didn't give up on Elijah. He understood how disheartening it was to have such a victory, but not get the result you had hoped. God's response was provision. A proper response to depression. God strengthened Elijah to keep going.

Read 1 Kings 19:4b-18. Was Elijah actually alone? No. He had Obadiah. There were also at least 100 prophets of Adonai. (You can see in the rest of the books of the Kings that there are many prophets calling out the evil of the kings.) Elijah knew this, but noticed he always worked alone.

See I have personal experience with what Elijah was getting at here. I've felt like the only

follower of Jesus' way at times when I was not actually alone. But what I meant was, I'm the only one who "actually cares" or who is "Convicted" about this.

This thought is mentally setting oneself up above their peers. I believe that's what we have here. Elijah isn't alone, and he knows it, but he set himself up above his peers, mentally. This creates actual loneliness. It causes a pity party. "I'm all alone. I'm the only one!"

God's response is very complex. In might, God shows Elijah what is supporting him. The raw strength. In quiet, God demonstrates that he is in the quiet. He's there when He is hard to perceive. God's not always in the mighty victories. They're impressive, but they are only effects. They are not His heart. His heart is in the whisper.

Yet, after this demonstration, Elijah gives the same answer. This is being a little defiant. Elijah wanted to save Israel NOW. He wanted their hearts to change NOW. He knew God had his back. He knew how mighty God was, but he didn't get what he had hoped.

So what God said next, I believe, was part punishment and part comfort. 2 kings would rise up to deal with Elijah's pursuers (comfort). Then, Elijah found out that he was being replaced by Elisha. This turned out to be bittersweet. Elijah insisted on having a pity party because he FELT alone. (Don't always trust your feelings) So Elijah was being replaced by someone who wouldn't throw a pity party, BUT this someone would also show Elijah that he wasn't the only one "on the level" and that he wasn't the only one so convicted.

Elisha became a great encouragement and friend to Elijah. So much so that Elijah didn't want Elisha to see him leave. After recruiting Elisha, Elijah continued his work. God wasn't done with him. God understood.

Conclusion: So what's the takeaway? Elijah fled because things didn't happen how he hoped, leading to disappointment. His mental elevation of himself over his peers led to self pity. Self-pity took him out of the fight, early. Elisha did literally twice as much as Elijah. He never had the same self-pity. No doubt Elijah taught Elisha not to have it.

I know many of us can isolate ourselves needlessly. "I'm the only one who suffers this". "I'm the only one who understands this." "I'm the only one who made this commitment, or that commitment." "I'm the only one for xyz".

Single sentence time. Well this time it's 2.

- If you allow yourself to be disappointed by the actions, reactions, stances, or understanding of the people around you, regardless as to scale of the disappointment or the nature of the relationship, and you let this disappointment change your perception of these same people such that you set yourself up above your peers in your own mind, then, you will bog yourself down and kill the influence that Christ can have through your actions.
- If you honor others for their faith, trust what God plans rather than what you hope for, and simply obey, then you will stay in the fight and see what wonders God had for you that you never thought to hope for.

Discussion Questions:

- Elijah was willing to be God's voice to Israel. He also was willing to be a part of many amazing miracles and acts for God. Yet he still found himself disappointed and discouraged when people didn't react in the time and way he thought they should.
 - Have you ever had an expectation of how/when God would act in a situation?
 - Have you ever been discouraged/disappointed if things were not up to *your* expectation?
- Elijah reacted to his disappointment by feeling like he was a failure. His focus was on himself (his expectations, his feelings).
 - How might things have looked for Elijah had he focused more on what God was doing overall instead of on himself?
- *Your expectations will always ruin your attitude faster than your reality.*
 - What does this mean to you?
 - How is your attitude affected when you look at something negatively? positively?