

THE BRAVERY OF ELIJAH

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Lesson: I Kings 18:17-40

One of the great men of the Old Testament was a person who never fought with his hands, but he was as brave as any man ever was. He was the prophet Elijah, and he lived at a time when the whole of the land of Israel had turned aside to worship other gods. King Ahab, and the wicked queen Jezebel had turned the people to the worship of Baal, and other gods, and Jezebel had had all the prophets of the Lord killed, so that only Elijah remained a prophet of the Lord in the land. There were 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of the groves, who sat at the queen's table and ate good food, and were well looked after, and the prophets of the Lord were dead.

Elijah was brave because he stood alone, the only man in the whole of Israel who fought for the worship of the Lord, and so strong was he in obeying the voice of the Lord that he is remembered as the greatest of the prophets. First he called a drought on the land of Israel, so that for three years there was no rain at all, and all the rivers dried up, and all the brooks became dry, and there was hardly any food left, because nothing grows without rain. This was done to show the *king* and the people that they had done evil in turning away from the Lord.

During those three years, the king sought Elijah to kill him. He looked for him, even in the nearby countries, and made these countries swear by an oath that he was not there. But after three years Israel was in so much trouble because of the lack of water and food that Elijah sent for the king, and the king came to him and did not try to kill him. Elijah then told the king to call all the people, and the false prophets to Mount Carmel, and there he had the contest of fire. The prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty of them, were to offer a sacrifice, and he was to offer one, but neither was to put fire under his altar. The god who sent fire down from heaven would be the god. And of course, Baal couldn't send fire down, because he was no god at all; but the Lord sent fire down, and such a fire that it burned up everything—bullock, water, stones.

Then Elijah killed the prophets of Baal, and he thought that his task was ended; but Queen Jezebel was furious, and wanted to kill him, so he had to flee. He was deeply upset, but the Lord sent him to Mount Horeb, the same range of mountains on which, so many hundreds of years before, He had given the Ten Commandments to Moses. There the Lord spoke to him, and comforted him, and Elijah returned to Israel.

Back in Israel, he proclaimed without fear the death of Ahab and Jezebel, especially for their terrible murder of Naboth, in order to steal his vineyard. And when Ahab was dead, and his son reigned, the new king once sent two bands of soldiers to capture Elijah. Elijah didn't run away, because that would not have been seemly; he simply asked the Lord to protect him, and the Lord sent fire from heaven, and burned up the soldiers.

By the time Elijah was taken up into heaven, then, he was more feared than any prophet before him had been. People knew that the Lord was with him, and he could not be harmed; and people knew also that if the king or the people did evil, Elijah was there, to tell them that the Lord was angry, and to promise punishment upon them.

His was a lonely road, one without friends, for the people feared him, and probably didn't even like him, because of the drought. But he *stood* firm against the whole country, the one prophet of the Lord, and through him the Lord did a great work. He turned the people away from the worship of Baal, back to the worship of the Lord. His name meant "Jehovah is God," and that was the work he did so bravely—he turned the people back to the worship of Jehovah.

Children, it's easy to be brave about doing the right thing when everyone around you is doing it too. It's very hard, when you are the only one, or when you're one of a small group, who are trying to do what's right. Then you really have to be strong. That is the kind of strength which Elijah had, and we can admire it; and each one of us can hope that if the time comes when we need strength like that, we will trust enough in the Lord to find it. *Amen.*