

Unfinished Business  
Elijah at Horeb  
1 Kings 19

900 years BC King Solomon left Israel a prosperous and significant power in the Middle East. But almost immediately after his death the kingdom divided in two, north and south. During the first 80-90 years after this division the southern state of Judah with Jerusalem and the Temple had four kings and it's worth noting the two who reigned longest were God-fearing men. By contrast during this same period the northern state had eight kings all of whom are described as evil and corrupt.

Yet in this situation of frequent crisis, uncertainty and decline spiritually, morally and socially, God raises up and equips His servant, the prophet Elijah.

Elijah is inspired to announce a three year drought to show the utter uselessness of popular idols like Baal which were supposed to increase fertility. No. It is the Lord God Almighty Who gives, or withholds the Harvest! Yet even in this time of desperate hardship and need, a widow's son is raised from the dead, symbolising hope for those whose trust is in the Lord.

God's representative Elijah prays and the rains return, but not before a spectacular showdown with 850 false prophets on Mt Carmel where God, His Word and His servant are vindicated as supernatural fire falls from heaven and consumes the offering.

That was last week. This week things are not so good.

As sometimes happens, after the mountain top comes an inevitable valley, and today we find God's servant losing heart, retreating from the public struggle and actually wishing it was all over.

We might identify with Elijah. Isn't it often the case we find the resources we need for the day of big, dramatic challenge, but afterwards or some time later, when the adrenaline and euphoria subside we suddenly feel weak, deflated, sad, anxious, despondent. And how quickly the enemy gets under our skin with accusations of failure, all our work and effort seem to no avail and we begin to imagine everyone would somehow be better off without us!

But it's not over. As the exhausted prophet sleeps, angels stand guard, and when he wakes the food he needs is provided. His life is not over. God has more ministry in store for Elijah, but at this point in his journey he needs to return to source to regain his strength.

He travels to Horeb, Mt Sinai far in the south. He could have gone to Jerusalem and the Temple, they were much closer. Sinai is farther in distance and symbolically farther back in time. Elijah is going beyond Solomon, beyond David. Horeb/Sinai is where God made the Covenant with Israel, giving them the Law and Commandments through Moses. Sometimes we have to go the full distance, we have to go right back to the source, to the Creator and His revelation of Himself as Saviour and Provider, back to our origin, our roots, our foundation in the Lord and His Word.

Elijah returns 'home' in a sense to Israel's spiritual birthplace and there God meets with him. He is given reminders that God is the Almighty Who ordains the storm, earthquake and fire, but then the Lord draws near to reassure His faithful servant with a *gentle* voice. The Word of the Lord, it's all he needs and more. This courageous Old Testament preacher returns encouraged with fresh insight and strength to complete His God-given mission.

Cracking story, but what's it got to do with us?

We are God's people, whatever our nationality, wherever we live in this 21<sup>st</sup> century if we trust and follow Jesus Christ God's Son. God speaks and instructs his people in every age through His Word recorded in the Bible. Here is wisdom for our minds, food for our hearts wherever we are on the journey.

We consider firstly Elijah, the brave but very human believer and servant of the Lord. Then from this same passage let's think of the God Elijah served.

Elijah was no coward. He faced the people, the king, 850 murderous false prophets. He declared the Word of the Lord faithfully even when it often appeared he was in a minority of one! But he was human just like us, and a threat from Queen Jezebel seemed to catch him somehow unguarded and he was engulfed in a wave of negativity.

The cause seemed lost. OK the fire had fallen, the rain had come but the people loved their idols. People don't really change, do they? It appeared hopeless. In any case he'd had enough of being misrepresented and ostracised, enough of the wilderness and this lonely calling.

Life hurts, and sometimes our wounds get the better of us. We're tempted to lose heart, stop trying, leave it for someone else to take up.

In one way it's comforting to know that even great spiritual leaders like Elijah are vulnerable but that's only half the lesson. The example we must follow here is that even though Elijah felt like giving up he didn't. He returned to 'bedrock', pouring out his frustration in faith and prayer to the Lord Who had fed and equipped him thus far.

- Lord, I'm personally all out of resources here but hallowed be *Your* name, build *Your* kingdom Lord, don't ever stop, *Your* will be done on earth, in our locality, in my little life for Your glory

Elijah – brave but human, vulnerable but faithful, he teaches us to keep our faith in God.

And we note that the Lord God worshipped by Elijah, and us, for in the end there only is one true God, the Lord is mighty but gracious. The Lord sends or withholds sun and rain, harvest and drought, prosperity and disaster. The reverent 'fear' of the Lord is the 'beginning of wisdom', the foundation for wise choices in life. And yet God's greatest revelation of Himself is not in frightening displays of raw power, but quiet, sensitive ministry to wounded souls.

This we see best in His Son, our Lord Jesus, Who took on human flesh and dwelt among us, showed such compassion to the crowds and gave his life to heal our brokenness with redeeming love.

Elijah wasn't finished yet. Neither are we.

Let's keep our faith steadfast in Jesus and see what our Lord has yet to do in, for and through us.

For His glory. Amen