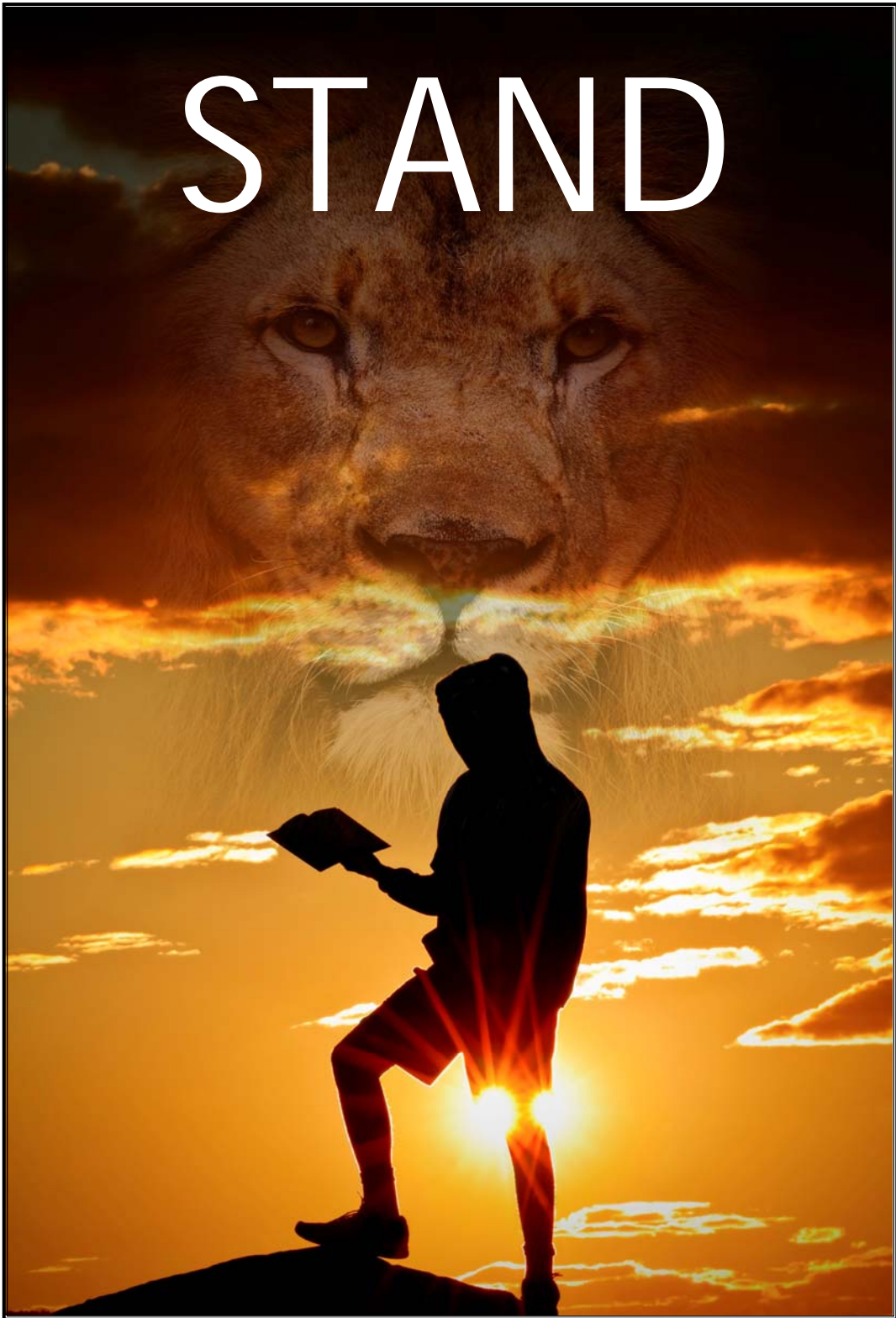


# STAND



**ELIJAH**  
A Study in 1 Kings

# ELIJAH: A Study in 1 Kings

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## Lesson 1: Live What You Believe

1 Kings 17:1-6

### INTRODUCTION: Welcome to Elijah's World

Welcome to the kingdom of Israel, more than 800 years before Jesus was born. We will be immersing ourselves in this world, as we embark on this series set within some of the most exciting chapters of the Old Testament. Yet while the action and exhilarating events of these narratives in 1 Kings make for a compelling read for us sitting comfortably in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must keep in mind the real life backdrop to 1 Kings 17-19. It was a profound, nation-wide spiritual crisis. The community of faith had drifted into grave danger. Beginning in chapter 17, their (and our) covenant LORD, the God of Israel, responds to their precarious situation with drastic measures. Let's orient ourselves to the nature of life in the northern kingdom, Israel, around 874 BC. Read 1 Kings 16.29-33 to witness the arrival to the royal throne of the man who has been described as "a villain" (D. Wiseman)!

- 1 a. Who came to power at this time? How long was his reign? (1 Kings 16.29)
  
- b. What is the Bible's opening description of Ahab? (v. 30)
  
- c. What is the name of the Phoenician princess he married and what was an immediate result of this alliance? (v. 31)
  
- d. How do we know that Ahab's idolatrous allegiance to Baal did not remain a private affair? (v. 32)
  
- e. Review the detail of God's covenant with Israel outlined in Deuteronomy 11.16-18a. How does this biblical background enable you to understand some of the threat Baal worship posed for Israel?
  
- f. Fill in our text's concluding remark: *Ahab did more to \_\_\_\_\_ the LORD, the God of Israel, to \_\_\_\_\_ than all the kings of Israel who were before him* (v. 33). That is not an evaluation to envy!

Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds;  
Deuteronomy 11:16-18a

### A WORD ABOUT BAAL

Baal makes his ugly appearance throughout the Old Testament. Considered to be a mighty storm god, he was sometimes known as the "Rider of the Clouds" (we realise that the psalmist is being derisive of Baalism when he writes, *The LORD* (not Baal!) *makes the clouds His chariots and rides on the wings of the wind* [Ps. 104.3]). Baal worshippers believed that he brought the rain. This made him responsible for the fertility of the land, the supply of food, for life itself.

## MEET ELIJAH!

As we dwell in 1 Kings, we will keep company with Elijah, a fiery and fascinating individual. This courageous prophet thundered warnings to God's people at a critical time. Their pursuit of prosperity and their culture of compromise had nearly extinguished their commitment to Yahweh, their Creator, their Redeemer, their covenant God. Yet God's covenant faithfulness to them was unchanging. Out of depths of His loyal love, He graciously used the voice of Elijah to summon His children back to Himself and back to obedience to the covenant He had initiated with them.

1 Kings 17.1 introduces: *Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe (or "of the settlers") in Gilead*. The inspired scriptures withhold any other information about Elijah's family, his status, his credentials, or his occupation. Rather, Elijah just bursts onto the scene, a previously unmentioned individual from seemingly humble beginnings, who takes both the king and the entire kingdom by storm.

A close, careful reading of 1 Kings 17.1 reveals a few more tidbits of information about the prophet.

- 2 a. In the Bible, personal names often reveal character. Elijah means "Yah(weh) is my God." How does the meaning of his name reflect Elijah's message and mission?
  
- b. "Tishbe" is either the name of an unidentified village or it means "the settlers." Gilead is an area in the northern reaches of Israel, on the far side of the Jordan. How do these reminders of Elijah's obscure and remote background affect how we appreciate his thunderous proclamation to the king?
  
- c. One other detail about the person of Elijah can be uncovered in 2 Kings 1.8. What was significant about Elijah's appearance? And does his fashion statement remind you of anyone else? (Hint: see Mark 1.6)

Now that we've met the key players in our passage, let's dive into today's text.

## **READ      1 Kings 17:1-6**

John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.  
Mark 1:6

## REVIEW

3. What devastating news did Elijah proclaim? (v. 1)
  
4. By Whose authority did Elijah announce the drought? (v. 1) How does this suggest that Elijah's blunt pronouncement is a challenge to more than just the king?
  
5. For the rest of chapter 17 and all of chapter 18, Baal is directly challenged by the powerful God of Israel. How is God described in v. 1? How does Elijah see himself in light of God? (v.1)
  
6. Elijah is an unknown to the reader of 1 Kings. How does v. 2 (and vv. 8, 16, 24; 18. 1, etc.) establish our confidence in his message?
  
7. Elijah goes from the courts of the king to a gully out in the boondocks (Kerith was on the far side of the Jordan River). What all does God command Elijah to do? (vv. 3-4) Of all the instructed actions in vv. 3-4, which do you think were the hardest to follow? Why?
  
8. Review v.2, then read v. 5a. What does this say about Elijah and the courage that his life of faithful obedience required?
  
9. Why did God "hide" (v. 3) Elijah? See 1 Kings 18.13 and 19.1-2 for some clues.
  
- 10a. Elijah faces danger, thirst and hunger. What does God provide? (vv. 5-6)
  
- b. Ravens not only were considered by Israelites to be unclean creatures (cf. Lev. 11.13-15), they also are voracious scavengers! Does God's choice of ravens for His divine food delivery service surprise you? What point about God's sovereignty is being underscored here?

## REFLECT

1. “It’s hardly possible to imagine a bigger catastrophe” writes one commentator (J. Goldingay) about the drought (and famine) of 1 Kings. Yet within that drought, Elijah is abundantly, miraculously sustained by his God. We well-supplied North Americans can easily overlook the sheer luxury of eating meat at all, let alone twice a day, and in a famine at that! This was more bountiful fare than even the manna and quail the Israelites were given in the desert (cf. Ex. 16)! Share with the group a time when your Saviour provided abundantly for you also amidst catastrophe.

*All too often as Christians, we tend to think that the work of God in our day is done by the great and powerful, the famous . . . the celebrities, and the influential wealthy.*

R. Dillard

2. Have you ever fallen into such deluded patterns of thinking? Why? How does today’s text correct that delusion?

Read Isaiah 53.2-3 (OPTION: See also John 1.46; 6.42; 7.52). What other servant of the LORD also came from a seemingly insignificant background?

Why does God relish using the unexpected and unqualified to accomplish His agenda? (Hint: 1 Cor. 1.27-31; Gal. 6.14).

3. 1 Kings dramatically casts God, not Elijah, as the Hero of the Elijah narratives. How does today’s passage enlarge our appreciation of God?
4. Paul House writes, “Elijah makes it his mission to teach that Yahweh lives.” Such a life-goal can indeed demand our courage and sacrifice. What are specific ways that we can show others our commitment to the living Lord, before Whom we too stand?

## RESPOND

Know therefore today and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.  
Deuteronomy 4.39

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 4.39.
2. Joseph Kahiga, principal of a Bible school in Kenya, concluded his sermon series on Elijah by leaning over the lectern and riveting his audience with flashing eyes. “You students have been asking me, ‘Where today is the God of Elijah?’” He continued, “Perhaps God is looking at us as we sit in chapel and asking Himself, ‘Where today are my Elijahs?’” Reflect on today’s text. Do you serve and obey God with the abandoned passion and courageous trust of Elijah? Do you respond to His Word as Elijah did? Talk to the Lord, the very same living God of 1 Kings 17, about your responses.
3. Earlier this study we noted that Israel’s relationship with God was polluted by her idolatry, pursuit of prosperity, and culture of compromise. With these factors in mind, evaluate the trajectory of your life over the past few months. Are you moving away from, or closer to, Christ and His kingdom?

## DIG DEEPER

1. While 17.4 usually is translated to the effect that the ravens will *feed* the prophet, in Hebrew the literal term is “to fill.” Possibly this verb was chosen to highlight the abundantly generous nature of God’s provision—not only would Elijah be fed, he would be *filled* in a time of famine. Savour these texts which remind us of our Creator’s boundless capacity to “fill” (that is, satisfy) us!

Deut. 11.13-15

Ps. 65.4; 81.10,16; 107.9

John 6.26-27, 35



2. Elijah refers to the LORD as the One “*before whom I stand*” (1 Kings 17.1). He likely has borrowed this expression from the language of the royal court, where the phrase is used to express the idea of commitment and service. Here are some other passages containing the phrase:

Deut. 10.8

1 Kings 18.15

Ezek. 22.30

## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Without question, Elijah is one of the most distinctive and diversely talented individuals in the Bible. He is prophet, preacher, political reformer, and miracle worker all at the same time. At the heart of this multifaceted person, though, rests one overriding conviction. Elijah . . . desires to magnify Yahweh over Baal . . . He makes it his mission to teach that Yahweh lives, that Baal does not exist, and that ethical standards flow from a commitment to the living God (P. House).

Elijah appears like a bolt out of the blue . . . We know nothing of his background except that he comes from the other side of the Jordan. Who he is as a person does not matter; what matters is that he is a man of God, someone taken hold of by God (J. Goldingay).

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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## Lesson 2: Faith to Believe

1 Kings 17:7-16

### READ 1 Kings 17:7-16

Through our last study, we learned that God's instructions can be breath-taking in their creativity: "Don't worry about this famine gripping the land. Wild, ever-hungry, scavenging birds will ensure you're lavishly fed." God's stunning plan for Elijah's protection and provision might have seemed almost ludicrous, if Elijah had evaluated it with unbelieving eyes. And now, yet again, the Creator of all unveils another strategy for provision that is wildly original . . . audacious even. Let's experience with Elijah how following the Lord is anything but predictable!

### REVIEW

1. Why did Elijah need to move on from his refuge in the gully? (v. 7)

2. Review: What had sparked Elijah to hide near the Kerith brook? (vv. 2-3)

What now instigates his next move? (v. 8)

What are we discovering about Elijah's way of living? How does this shed light on his great courage?

3. Where was Elijah to go? (v. 9)

Alert! What was Elijah's arch-enemy, Queen Jezebel's, hometown? (cf. 16.31) What was a stronghold of Baal worship?

4. To whom was Elijah to flee? (v. 9)

Alert! Who were usually some of the poorest members of society in Elijah's day?

5. Read the opening phrases of verses 9 and 10. What picture are we starting to develop of Elijah?

6. The Elijah narratives dazzle us with the might and sovereignty of God. Yet what reminder is tucked into v. 10 of God's unseen hand moving in the quiet ordinariness of daily routines?

*Not only is Baal incapable of overcoming the drought, but the provision of Yahweh for the faithful prophet takes place right in the heart of Baal territory!*  
A. Konkel

7. What are Elijah's two requests? (vv. 10b-11) How does reading them in the context of this chapter dramatically alter their significance? (e.g., v. 7)
8. How does verse 12 reveal the desperate poverty of this woman?
- 9a. What profound act of faith is the woman called to in v. 13?
- 9b. What profound promise of faith is the woman given in v. 14?

For thought: Is this one example of “the ironies of the kingdom?” (a phrase borrowed from Dominic Smart) Elijah's most formidable adversary will be a woman from Sidon, Queen Jezebel. God provides years of refuge *from* a woman of Sidon *through* another woman of Sidon, the unnamed widow of Zarephath. Are there other “merciful ironies” (Smart) you can detect in these Elijah stories?

10. It's tempting to think of people in the Bible as caricatures. So we can categorise Elijah as courageous, passionate, a warrior in prayer. How does Elijah's reassurance to the widow in v. 13 reveal something of his compassionate side?
11. Consider the depth of trusting sacrifice implicit in the woman's acceptance of God's command (v. 13) and promise (v. 14). Elijah's requests—prompted by God—demand that she risk absolutely everything. How does her act of faith in “*the LORD, the God of Israel*” (vv. 12, 14) stand as a rebuke to Israel?
12. In the midst of widespread famine, what was God's provision—not only for Elijah, but also for the woman, her son, and her household (v. 15)?
13. Re-read all of v. 16. If we absorb only the first half of the verse, we are moved and amazed by a spectacular miracle of grace. And that is good. Yet if we continue reading, we acquire insight into a key truth displayed by this story. What is it?
14. Miracles in the Bible aren't magical tricks, meant to mesmerise or entertain us. Rather, they are purposeful—they testify to God's character, they accredit the prophet or apostle associated with them, they point ahead to some aspect of Christ's kingdom. How have the two miracles of 1 Kings we've encountered so far been purposeful: for the Sidonian widow? For Elijah? For us, the readers?

## REFLECT

- 1 Kings 17 showcases the LORD's saving love for individuals from all nations, exemplified in his care for a non-Israelite widow.

How does this *reflect* His plan of grace and blessing for all nations revealed to Abram? See Gen. 12.2-3.

How does this *anticipate* His plan of grace and blessing for all nations realised in Christ? See Rom. 10.9, 12-13.

Don't you love how our Elijah stories fit into God's larger story of salvation for the entire world?

2. Read Deut. 10.17-19. How does the Lord Himself model in 1 Kings what one aspect of obedience to His "*covenant of love*" (Deut. 7.12, NIV) looked like?

How did Jesus' life and death also embody such fulfillment of the Law?

3. In 1 Kings 17, God gave life-sustaining bread, even to those outside of Israel. Jesus would later pick up on the bread (and manna) stories of the Old Testament and apply their significance to Himself. What parallels can you spot between 1 Kings 17 and John 6.48, 51? What critical differences?

God could  
not be God  
if He was  
not true to  
His word.  
R. Dillard

4. How has God been true to His word throughout 1 Kings so far? What about in your faith journey?

Man does not live by  
bread alone but by  
every word that comes  
from the mouth of the  
LORD.  
Deuteronomy 8.3

## RESPOND

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 8.3
2. *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God . . .* (Deut. 8.10). Endeavour this week, every time you eat (even a granola bar!), to thank God for the gift of food. And let it also remind you of your ultimate nourishment—Christ the Bread of Life.
3. Thank God that His ways of providing totally surpass our expectations. They can be audaciously original—like at the Cross. Be alert this week for unexpected ways He provides for you. Thank Him.

## DIG DEEPER

1. Early in His ministry, Jesus referred to this very story, the account of God providing for the widow in Zarephath through Elijah. Read Luke 4.24-30. What essential point was Jesus making? What was His listeners' response to this reminder of God's choice of and care for the non-Israelite woman?
2. God's grace is constantly emphasised by His choice of the most unlikely of individuals to further His plan of salvation.
  - a. Consider God's remarkable choice of the Sidonian widow as a means of protection and provision for Elijah. Who would you suggest as a suitable provider for Elijah? Would your choice match God's in terms of: Gender? Marital status? Socio-economic position? Nationality? Religion? Location?
  - b. List some examples of God's selection of individuals who were not the "obvious choice." Here are some references to get you started!
    - Exodus 4.10-13
    - Judges 3.15
    - Judges 4.1-4, 9
    - 1 Samuel 16.1-13
    - Isaiah 52.13-53.3



## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

*[This] incident must have served not only as a source of great comfort for the simple, godly, non-Jewish woman . . . but also as a strengthening to Elijah's faith in God's providence (Ps. 37.3-4; Isa. 41.10). The episode also stands impressed in the pages of history as a lasting memorial to the availability of God's full provision to all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.*

**R. D. Patterson**

*Imagine the widow's perspective. How would you have responded when the prophet showed up and asked for food while you were preparing what would apparently be the final meal for you and your son? . . . Was there any reason for this widow to believe this poor, mendicant foreigner? Yet when she believed the promise of God, it brought food to her and family during the years of the drought. God's promises often look a bit foolish, even downright unbelievable. And they always require faith. Yet the good news of God's promises, the gospel, when believed and obeyed, becomes the very power of God!*

**R. Dillard**

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS



## Lesson 3: From Disbelief to Faith

1 Kings 17:17-24

### READ 1 Kings 17:17-24

In our previous studies, Israel's God, Yahweh, has proven to be both the source of rain and the supplier of food and protection. This week, the LORD shows Himself to be sovereign even over death. As we enter into the story, we realise that *In His hand is the life of every living thing* (Job 12.10). Thus the tension mounts in the contest between Yahweh, the God of Israel, and Baal. We realise that the three episodes in 1 Kings 17 all . . . address human needs that were the particular province of Baal's power in Canaanite mythology . . . There could be no clearer way to throw down the gauntlet to the worship of Baal (R. Dillard). The Elijah stories are not a cosy read, meant to sooth us to slumber. They are intended to awaken and confront us. Let today's passage challenge your heart in a fresh way.

### REVIEW

1. What happened within the household miraculously fed by God? (v. 17)
2. How did the widow interpret this event? (v. 18)

The widow's instinctive reading of her situation was that this tragedy was a punishment from God. It's helpful to compare her interpretation with that of Jesus when He too was faced by parents and a child overtaken by calamity. See John 9.1-3.

3. How did Elijah react to the widow's accusation? (vv. 19-20a)
4. Re-read the beginning words of v. 20 and v. 21. In contrast to the widow, how does Elijah respond to the boy's death?

*And he \_\_\_\_\_ (or, cried out, NIV) to the LORD . . . [He] \_\_\_\_\_ (or, cried out, NIV) to the LORD.*

5. Let's pay close attention to the way Elijah twice addresses God in his prayer.

Vv. 20-21: "*O LORD \_\_\_\_\_ God . . . O LORD \_\_\_\_\_ God . . .*"

What does this wording reveal about Elijah's relationship with the living God?

*Is it not ironic that the widow thought of her son's death as a reminder of her sin? But the widow's son was not given as the price for her sin. Only God could give a Son to pay that price.*

R. Dillard

OPTION: Read also 18.10 to see that others, like the palace official Obadiah, are aware of this. Is the personal way *we* relate to God as well known?

6. How did the LORD acknowledge Elijah's cry? (v. 22)
  
7. Compare the sequence of actions in v. 19 with the sequence of actions in v. 23. What point might the author be making?
  
8. Pause and contemplate the profound meaning and mystery of vv. 22-23. Did you know that this is the first time in Scripture where someone who had died is raised to life? What is the significance of this (at that time) incomparable miracle occurring outside of Israel's boundaries . . . in the home of a Sidonian woman?
  
9. In what ways did the astounding gift of new life change the Sidonian woman's perceptions . . .
  - Of Elijah? (v. 24a)
  - Of God's word? (v. 24b)
  
10. Reflecting back over all of chapter 17, how do these narratives usurp Baal's claim as worthy of worship? How do they deny his alleged powers—over "his" territory? Weather? Food? Life and Death?
  
11. We reflected last study on the way that miracles are meant for more than entertainment or shock value. They are purposeful, they are anticipatory. How does the miracle in today's passage anticipate the coming of Christ and His kingdom?

## REFLECT

1. Read Romans 15.4. How did our text teach us? We've already learned that Yahweh is the living God; what else do we learn about God?
2. It's fascinating to observe the (pagan) widow's recognition that sin deserves death. Explore the Bible's perspective on this truth by selecting one of the following passages: Deut. 24.16; Ezek. 18.1-4; Rom. 5.12.

Then soak in the good news of Romans 6.23.

Finally, consider how this reality is viewed by our society. Why is this a crucial truth? How can we appropriately communicate it?

3. Our passage today contains the Bible's very first instance of someone being raised from the dead. In light of this, re-visit Elijah's prayer in v. 21. Why is it so astonishing? How does the faith of our own prayer lives compare with Elijah's?
4. The final words of our narrative are: *"Now I know . . . that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth"* (v. 24). Jesus echoes her words when He prays, *"Your Word is truth"* (John 17.17). How can we allow the truth of God's Word to shape our thought patterns, our personalities, our daily routines?

Love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the LORD is your life.  
Deuteronomy 30.20 (NIV)

## RESPOND

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 30.20
2. Schedule a block of time to re-read 1 Kings 17.17-24, then John 11.17-37. Prayerfully read aloud Jesus' words in vv. 25-26. Conclude your time by conversing with Him about your response to His penetrating question: *"I am the resurrection and the life . . . Do you believe this?"*
3. Elijah cried out to the LORD and the LORD listened to his voice. Be encouraged by your Saviour's listening ear this week: unburden your heart and cry out to Him.

## DIG DEEPER



1. As we pondered Elijah's prayer, we realised that his request for the boy to be returned to life was nothing short of astounding. Abraham too exercised profound faith. We learn from the New Testament that, like Elijah, Abraham *considered that God was able even to raise [his son] from the dead!* (Heb. 11.19). Read the full account in Genesis 22.1-18. Then enjoy the New Testament commentary on Abraham's faith in Hebrews 11.17-19.
2. Did you know that, like Elijah, Jesus also travelled to the same general area, and while there, healed the child of another woman from near Sidon? We can draw a further parallel between the two healings as we note that Jesus commended this other woman from Sidon for her great faith. Read the full account in Matthew 15.21-28.
3. One of the three people whom Jesus raised from the dead also was the son of a widow. Read Luke 7.11-17, noting any echoes of 1 Kings. What was the response to this miracle?

## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

*[Our daily needs] are often met, perhaps even taken for granted, through the ordinary means of God's providence. Even when our situation may become grave, sudden relief can be attributed to some idol, a product of our own effort . . . But when life comes from the grave, we know that we are in the presence of God. He and He alone can do this.*

**R. Dillard**

*Elijah's faith in the midst of uncertainty allows God to use him to demonstrate God's life-giving power, his constant watchfulness, and his compassion even on those outside the elect nation.*

**P. R. House**

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS





## Lesson 4: Gutsy Faith

1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-40

### READ 1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-40

Enter this week's text and experience one of the most dramatic incidents in the Old Testament. The tension between the claims of Yahweh, Israel's God, and Baal has been simmering. This week we'll witness that tension mount, then explode, on the summit of Mount Carmel as the LORD of Israel dramatically demonstrates that He is the true, the living, the mighty, the only God. Join Elijah as he courageously maintains his faith in the face of what must have seemed like overwhelming odds.

### REVIEW

1. Cast your memory over the events of chapter 17. How had God led Elijah through experiences that progressively matured and prepared him for the tension (and terror?) of the showdown with Baal's prophets? What had he been experiencing of God?
2. What information from vv. 1-2 can we glean that "sets the stage" for the coming confrontation between Elijah and King Ahab? Consider the drought's duration (cf. Lk. 4.25) and degree (see v. 5).
3. After three years of being in hiding, how was Elijah greeted by the king? (v. 17)
4. How did Elijah reciprocate Ahab's greeting? (v. 18a)
  - a. What did he identify as the key reasons for the drought? (v. 18)
  - b. What extraordinary suggestion does he make to the king? (v. 19)
  - c. Who all was to be summoned to this hill-top contest? (v. 19)
  - d. Although his bravery is not implicitly named here, how does Elijah's courage become obvious to us?
5. What clear-cut choice did Elijah throw down before all Israel? And how did Israel "respond?" (vv. 20-21) (Silence can speak volumes!)

6. In what way would the contest challenge Yahweh and Baal to show who truly was God? (vv. 22-24)
  
- 7 a. Describe how the prophets implored Baal—the so-called storm god who claimed to control thunder and lightning (fire)—to act (vv. 25-29).
  - b. What was the stark outcome of their frenzied, self-mutilating efforts? (v. 29b)
  
8. How did Elijah's calm preparations of his sacrifice differ from the Baal prophets'?
  - vv. 30-31
  - v. 32
  - vv. 33-35

What point(s) do you think he was making?
  
9. Consider the scene so far. How had Elijah "stacked the deck" in favour of Baal? How did this serve, ultimately, to highlight the glory of God?
  
10. How does Elijah's prayer contrast with the frantic yet futile cries of the Baal prophets? (vv. 36-37)
  
11. Elijah prays to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Earlier he had alluded to the 12 tribes of Jacob by an "object lesson" using 12 stones and 12 jars of water (vv. 31-34). Why did he include these symbolic reminders of Israel's covenant history and identity?
  
12. Chapter 17 depicted the might and blessing of God primarily outside of Israel, while Elijah was among "the nations." How does the focus now shift? (v. 36)
  
13. The miracles of chapter 17 were revelatory—they made God known (cf. 17.24). How would God answering by fire make Him known in Israel? (v. 36, v. 37) And what would be the result of that "knowledge?" (v. 37c)
  
14. What prayer request (after three years of drought) might be expected? Why was it omitted?

15. How did God spectacularly answer Elijah's prayer?

v. 38

v. 39

Pause and fully appreciate this worship by *all the people* (v. 39). Revisit Mount Carmel with your biblical imagination. In the twilight of that momentous day, the people of God *finally* had their hearts turned back, to worship God with abandoned reverence: "*The LORD—He is God! The LORD—He is God!*" We might think the arrival of rain is the perfect ending, but it is this moment of worship that is the true climax of the narrative.

*The goal of the events at Mount Carmel was not so much judgement in the defeat of Baal as it was grace in reclaiming Israel.*

**R. Dillard**

## REFLECT

1. The wording of v. 21 is arresting. When we try to live with two competing sets of values, we can only *limp along* (v. 21 ESV; cf. v. 26). Contrast such hobbling with the vigour portrayed in Ps. 119.32. How do *the commandments* feed the energy and momentum of the Christian race? (Remember Ahab, v. 18, who *abandoned the commandments* and then limped along!)
2. Elijah's challenge was bold and blunt: The choice was either Yahweh or Baal, with no option offered of an accommodating middle ground. How does Jesus likewise confront us boldly and bluntly? See John 14.6.

How can we embody kindness and compassion (Eph. 4.32) while bravely maintaining Jesus' challenge? Share with your group how you strive to maintain that balance.

3. *Idolatry is our default sin. It's the first commandment given and the first commandment broken. All else follows from serving the wrong God (Dominic Smart).* Is this true of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian church?
4. Elijah reminded God's people of their spiritual identity and heritage. Do we also intentionally refresh our trust, and confidence in prayer, by rehearsing God's past covenant faithfulness? How can we better do this? As individuals? As a community?
5. Elijah's prayer is astonishing. Our prayer lives can easily be reduced to a listing of needs (largely physical) that we dutifully rattle off to a God whom we treat like a moody Santa Claus. Elijah *will* pray for rain; keep on reading! But his foremost passion is for God to be truly known, glorified, and worshipped. How could Elijah's example prompt us to expand our prayers this week?

## RESPOND

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 4.35
2. While we cherish many of the Bible's pictures of God, we don't often dwell on depictions of Him as a thunderstorm! Are we unsettled when He is compared to a ferocious storm? Prayerfully read through Psalms 29. Ask that God's Spirit would draw you into an enlarged understanding of His grandeur. Conclude by resting in the truth of the final verse: This God of fierce splendour is also the One Who, through Christ, graces us with strength and peace.
3. As you pray for loved ones this week, preface requests for physical needs with passion like Elijah's. Pray that they would come to know God more truly, and that their hearts be turned back to acknowledge Him with love and reverence.

To you it was shown,  
that you might know  
that the LORD is God;  
there is no other  
besides Him.  
Deuteronomy 4.35

## DIG DEEPER



1. Tucked into the opening verses of this chapter is an intriguing vignette of Obadiah, an individual who struggled to balance serving Ahab and overseeing the palace (18.3) with a life of fearing God (18.3) and protecting His people (18.4). Read 18.1-16. Contrast Obadiah with both the widow of Zarephath and King Ahab. How does the narrative stimulate our understanding of what it means to follow the LORD with loyal love while living in a culture that denies His claims to be the true God.
2. One commentator, Raymond Dillard, applauds Obadiah's attempts to serve God while working for the court of Ahab: *There are many possible responses to the difficulties of righteous living in a hostile world . . . Withdrawal may be in order for a time, whether to save lives, or for spiritual refreshment. However, wholehearted engagement with the world, with the political and economic process, is for most of us the way in which we can bear witness before a watching world. Do you agree with Dillard's assessment?*
3. How did that fire from heaven ignite other memories of God's power in the past? Enjoy exploring Exodus 19.1-2, 16-19; Leviticus 9.22-24; Judges 6.20-22; 13.17-22.

## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

*At the precise moment when all hope of igniting the wood seemed totally lost, Elijah stepped forward and called on God . . . God answered; and such an answer! Heavenly fire fell and consumed not only the wood and sacrifice, but the stones, the soil, and even the surrounding water. What a contrast! The prophets of Baal had kept up their wailing and wild ritual for the better part of a day and met with dead silence. Elijah's petition had lasted less than a minute but produced spectacular results. The difference lay in the One addressed.*

R. D. Patterson

*I wish Elijah hadn't killed all those other prophets . . . It wasn't usually what prophets did . . . This was an extraordinary occasion . . . There are occasions when God says, 'That's it' and takes desperate action. This was one of those occasions. Like Jesus' warnings about hell, the story is meant to leave us horrified and to make us face the possible consequences of making the wrong choice about whether to follow the real God, who has made himself known to us.*

J. Goldingay

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS



## Lesson 5: Believing Prayer

1 Kings 18:41-19:8

### READ 1 Kings 18:41-19:8

As we've inhabited the world of 1 Kings, we have never forgotten that God Himself is the centre and the ultimate Hero of these stories. Yet we also find ourselves fascinated by the character of Elijah. Last week we marvelled at his courageous passion and profound faith as he prayed on Mt. Carmel. His example prompts us to ask: "Do we, can we, 21<sup>st</sup> century believers likewise pray with courage, passion, and trust?" Jesus' brother, James, reminds us that Elijah was no superhero saint, but a real human, *with a nature like ours* (James 5.17). This week's study will lead us to a deeper acquaintance with this complex and human individual, especially as we witness the ways he connected and communicated with his God. Let's return to Mount Carmel.

### REVIEW

1. A key word of chapter 18 has been *answer* (cf. vv. 24, 26, 26, 29, 37, 37). God miraculously answered Elijah's prayer—by divine fire which consumed the altar, even as it ignited a response in His people's hearts. Yet what problem still needs an answer?
2. Even though the contest between Yahweh and Baal has been decisively won, Elijah's labours are not over. Where does he next go and what does he do? (v. 42)

Note: Strictly speaking, the Bible doesn't specify here that Elijah is praying; it merely says that he adopts a posture that is reflective of humble entreaty. James 5.18 affirms our tentative assumption that Elijah is, in fact, likely praying for rain.

3. How does v. 43 point us to Elijah's faithful persistence?
4. How would remembering the words of Solomon's prayer of dedication embolden Elijah now to pray for rain? (See 1 Kings 8.35-36)
5. God's earlier response to prayer had been electrifying. Describe His more subtle response (v. 44).

OPTION: Read Luke 12.54., where Jesus refers to cloud formation over the Mediterranean Sea.

6. Recap the exciting conclusion to this chapter, noting the two-part unfolding of God's miraculous provision:  
v. 45  
v. 46  
(By the way, it is 27 km from Mount Carmel to Jezreel!)
7. The final verse of chapter 18 assures us that *the hand of the LORD was on Elijah*. Perhaps fortified by that enablement, and buoyed by God's momentous victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah returned to Jezreel (where Ahab and Jezebel were living in a palace [1 Kings 21.1]), confidently expecting that all opposition had been silenced. Review 19.1-2 for a reality check.

*Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel was not the definitive defeat of evil—that would only come later at the cross.*  
**R. Dillard**

- a. Had Ahab truly repented? Notice to whom he attributes all that has occurred (v. 1).
  - b. What was Jezebel's first move following the death of "her" prophets?
  8. Verse 3 stops us in our tracks! What does Elijah—our prophet of courage and conviction—do when faced with Jezebel's death threat?
9. Consider Elijah's fear-driven flight: He races through the Northern Kingdom to its neighbour, \_\_\_\_\_. He runs to Judah's southernmost city, \_\_\_\_\_. From there, he flees even further, a day's journey into \_\_\_\_\_. (vv. 3-4)
  10. Collapsed under the meagre cover of a desert shrub, Elijah (finally!) cries out to God. What is his shocking request? (v. 4)
  11. God's tender response to His exhausted servant's prayer delights and, maybe, surprises us. Review vv. 5b-7. How does the LORD, for the third time, inventively care for Elijah's needs?
  12. What do the LORD's words, conveyed through the angel of the LORD, reveal of our Saviour's heart for His vulnerable children? (v. 7)
  13. Physically revitalised by that heaven-given food, Elijah sets out yet again. How long does he travel and to where? (v. 8). Consider the scriptural significance of both his journey's length and destination.

So we leave Elijah for now. The LORD has shown Himself to be the only true God. He has revived the idolatrous hearts of His people. He has blessed the land with life-giving rain. He has graced His prophet with supernatural strength and life-giving bread. So we can't help but wonder: What on earth will He do next, now that Elijah has journeyed to the mount of God, the very place the LORD first revealed His burning glory and covenant name to Moses? Next study, we'll find out!



## REFLECT

1. James comments on our text: *Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours and he prayed fervently* (Jam. 5.17). Discuss what fervent or “earnest” (NIV) prayer looks like.
  - a. How does Elijah’s example (e.g., 18.36-37, 42-43) motivate you?
  - b. What are your greatest hindrances to praying like this? Thinking through 19.3-5, what may have hindered Elijah?
2. In 18.46, we learned that because *the hand of the LORD was upon him*, Elijah was supernaturally energised. Then in chapter 19, we again witness God sustaining His servant. While we can’t use this passage to justify demands for “angel food” (cakes or otherwise!), we can be encouraged to rely on God as we serve Him. Read 1 Peter 4.10-11. What echoes of Elijah’s experience can you detect? How do these truths apply to us?
3. When Elijah literally crashes to the dust in the desert, the LORD tends to and nourishes him. Dwell on Jesus’ invitation to His hungry and weary disciples in Mark 6.31: “*Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest*” (NIV). How can we allow Jesus to nurture and nourish us when we too are ready to crash?
4. The *ESV Study Bible* notes comment that in 19.8, Elijah arrives, not at Mount Carmel to confront Baal, but at “another mountain to confront . . . the Lord himself, whom Elijah serves but whose ways he only partly understands and accepts.” Have you recently found yourself moving towards greater understanding or acceptance of God? What’s He been teaching you?

## RESPOND

The LORD our God is with us, whenever we pray to Him.  
Deuteronomy 4.7, NIV

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 4.7
2. Are you struggling with exhaustion? Or resentment at lack of success, or even any results at all? Talk to God about this. Rely on Him for nurture and nourishment. He is not predictable, but He is faithful.
3. 1 Kings 19 reminds us that even when we give up, the Lord remains God. The battle is not, ultimately, ours. It is His, and it has been won already at the Cross. Thank Christ for this. Deliberately let your mind rest in this reassurance this week.

## DIG DEEPER

1. In Hebrew, the terms for “messenger” and “angel” are the same. So our text demonstrates that when Jezebel seeks to terrify Elijah through *her* messenger (19.2), God is more than able to counter her move by sending His *own* “messenger” twice to tend to Elijah (19.5, 7). God cannot be intimidated or out-manoeuvred—then or now! Name these other individuals to whom God also sent a “messenger:”

Genesis 16.7-13

Genesis 19.1-22

Genesis 31.3-5, 11-13

Judges 6.11-16

Judges 13.1-23

2. Elijah is sustained by God’s provision and travels through the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. Attentive Bible readers will recognise that time period as being familiar and significant within both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., the duration of the rain during the flood). What other two men would also, like Elijah, rely on God for strength for forty days and forty nights?

Exodus 24.18 (and again, 34.28)

Matthew 4.1-2



## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

*Elijah had come to bask in the glow of the spectacular . . . What he needed to learn, God would soon show him. God does not always move in the realm of the extraordinary. To live always seeking one “high experience” after another is to have a misdirected zeal. The majority of life’s service is in quiet, routine, humble obedience to God’s will.*

R. D. Patterson

*The display of raw power on Mount Carmel did not produce repentance in Jezebel. Instead, she renewed her effort to take the prophet’s life . . . Miracles cannot of themselves soften hard hearts or open eyes—only God can do this.*

R. Dillard

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS



## Lesson 6: Show Me Your Glory!

1 Kings 19:9-18

### READ 1 Kings 19:9-18

A shining moment in Israel's history occurred when God showed Moses His glorious presence through the ever-burning bush and then disclosed the nature of His personal covenant name. This historic meeting had been on Mount Horeb, "the mountain of God" (Ex. 3.1). Our text this week begins with Elijah, having journeyed forty days and forty nights through the wilderness, now also at Mt. Horeb, the same revered place where God revealed Himself to Moses, calling and commissioning him to a great work. Will Elijah too have a similar encounter on the mountain? Let's find out.

### REVIEW

1. What was Elijah's first action on Mt. Horeb? (v. 9a)
2. A Scriptural Excursion: The OT seems to use "Mt. Horeb" interchangeably with "Mt. Sinai (e.g., Deut. 5.2; Mal. 4.4). Before exploring Elijah's experience with God at the cave on Mount Horeb, refresh your memory about another encounter of Moses with God there, recorded in Exodus.

33. 6                      Where is Moses?

33.18                     What did Moses request?

33.19-22                How did God answer that request? (See 34.5-7)

34.8-9                    How did Moses respond to this magnificent display of God's character?

Keeping this background in mind enables us to approach our passage in its inspired context. We can read with scriptural expectations: How will the prophet Elijah show himself compared with the great prophet, Moses?

3. What happened to Elijah in "the cave?" (v. 9b)

4. Copy God's enquiry of Elijah in v. 9b:
-

5. Re-read Elijah's explanation. (v. 10)
  - a. What was his focus?
  - b. How does he describe God's many recent miracles?
  - c. For what does he condemn Israel?
  - d. How does he refer to himself and his situation?
6. How have Elijah's exhaustion and emotions (fear, self-pity? resentment?) led his perception of reality astray? (v. 10) HINT: Review devout Obadiah's words to Elijah in 18.13.

7. As did Moses, Elijah will experience the awesome presence of the LORD. List the first three ways God unleashes a fraction of His majestic glory for Elijah. (vv. 11-12)

8. In what final, and unexpected, way does God unveil His presence? (v. 12)

9. Following this shattering display, the LORD probes Elijah by posing a question to him. What is this question? Why is it familiar? What might be God's purpose for this second questioning?

A Scottish minister writes this about being in the presence of a "holy and gloriously unmanageable God:

*Perhaps our prayers and expectations of God tend to be small, short-term and manageable . . . God's ways are more wonderful than we usually dare to think.*

Dominic Smart

10. Compare Elijah's second response (v. 14) with his first (v. 10). What has he learned from his mountain top meeting with God?

11. Interestingly, the LORD does not rebuke Elijah. But He also doesn't indulge him in his condemnation of Israel and pity for himself. Rather, *God answered Elijah's despair by giving him a new purpose* (R. Hubbard). Elijah is re-commissioned with new instructions. His mission now is to anoint (designate as divinely appointed) three new political or spiritual leaders who would complete the execution of God's judgement on the idolatry of Israel. Name the three men and their roles:

v. 15

v. 16

v. 16

12. The LORD has tended to Elijah's hunger and exhaustion by supplying food and angelic care. He had provided for his loneliness and weariness by appointing Elisha, first as an attendant (19.21), later as a successor. He has granted the prophet a fresh vision of Himself. He had reminded Elijah of His sovereignty over the natural world (19.11-12), over national politics (19.16) and even international affairs (19.15). How do His final words here to Elijah further encourage (and correct) the prophet? (19.18)

## REFLECT

1. Before being sent to their new tasks of service, both Moses and Elijah were graced by an encounter with God, where they realised more fully the true wonder, strength and beauty of His character. How can we too seek to know and experience Him more deeply? How can we expose both mind and heart to more of His might and majesty?
2. Today's passage reminds us that while the men and women of Scripture may be our examples, they're not to be our ultimate heroes. The LORD is the true Hero of our 1 Kings narratives. Consider Elijah—a great man of God yet still . . . a man, a human, with flaws and vulnerabilities like our own. In what ways does Elijah point to the need for Christ and His superior ministry?
3. *The work and presence of God in Elijah's day, no less than in our own, were marked by the presence of the Word of God* (R. Dillard). God's voice came to Elijah—not in the cataclysmic forces of wind, earthquake or fire—but in a “low” (ESV) or “gentle” (NIV) whisper, literally something like “a voice of thin silence.” Why might the LORD have revealed Himself to Elijah through His quiet, seemingly unspectacular word? Are there times when we slight His Word because we're craving the spectacular? What's the remedy?
4. The psalmist testified: *“This God—His way is perfect! And the word of the LORD proves true”* (Ps. 18.30). Yet “perfect” and “proven” can't always be equated with “predictable!” How have the Elijah stories helped you to appreciate the uniqueness, the variety, and the creativity of God's ways? Have they sharpened your *expectancy*: that the LORD is the God who can and will do astonishing things? Have they tempered your *expectations*: that the LORD must do something in just a certain way? (adapted from Mark Buchanan, *Your God is Too Safe*)

## RESPOND

1. MEMORISE: Deuteronomy 3.24
2. Elijah would once again witness the splendour of the LORD . . . but on a different mountain, hundreds of years later! Join Elijah, and Moses, on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke 9.28-36. With them gaze on the shining glory of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Worship Him.
3. Emotion and exhaustion can defeat even the most committed of God's servants. Pray for the leaders of the persecuted church around the world—that they would experience God afresh and be strengthened by His presence and His Word.

O LORD GOD, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?

Deuteronomy 3.24

## DIG DEEPER



1. Our passage's concluding verse reveals that not only are there the faithful believers we've learnt about--Elijah, the God-fearing Obadiah, and the two fifty-member companies of prophets—God also has reserved seven thousand other believers who had not shown allegiance to Baal. Study Romans 11.1-6 to see how this remnant can be seen as a token of God's grace.

2. A careful reading of our text reveals that the narrative deliberately invites our comparison of Elijah with Moses. See how many parallels you can detect!

<u>Elijah</u>	<u>Moses</u>	<u>Parallels between the Prophets</u>
1 Kings 17.1; 18.18	Ex. 5.1	
1 Kings 19.4	Ex. 32.32; cf. Num. 11.15	
1 Kings 19.8	Ex. 24.18; 34.28	
1 Kings 19.8	Ex. 3.1	
1 Kings 19.9	Ex. 33. 22	
1 Kings 19.11	Ex. 34.6	
1 Kings 19.11-12	Ex. 19.16-19	
1 Kings 19.16	Num. 11.16-17	

## FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Commenting on the confirmation of Elijah's mission at Mount Horeb, one commentator notes, *The despair of Elijah demonstrates the frailty of human strength and the power of God that is liberated within human weakness. Elijah is shown to be a true prophet in the tradition of Moses, and God is shown to be sovereign in the forces of nature, a monarch over the kings of this world and the Redeemer of his people.*

A. Konkel

God's preservation of the 7000 reminds Elijah that God's word cannot be silenced. It remains the force that produces the remnant, protects the remnant, and empowers the remnant.

P. House

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

## RESOURCE GUIDE FOR 1 KINGS

Raymond B. Dillard. *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel according to Elijah and Elisha* (P & R Publishing)

John Goldingay. *1 & 2 Kings for Everyone* (Westminster / John Knox)

Paul R. House. *1, 2 Kings: An Exegetical and Theological Commentary of Holy Scripture* (New American Commentary)

Robert L. Hubbard Jr. *First and Second Kings* (Moody)

August H. Konkel. *1 & 2 Kings* (NIV Application Commentary)

R. D. Patterson. *1 Kings* (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Donald J. Wiseman. *1 and 2 Kings* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)

### **Also consulted:**

Mark Buchanan. *Your God is Too Safe: Recovering the Wonder of a God You Can't Control* (Multnomah)

*The English Standard Version Study Bible* notes

David M. Howard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Moody)

*The New International Version Study Bible* notes

Dominic Smart. "A long, slow-motion crash: Judges 2.6-16.31" in *Encounter with God* July-September 2012 (Scripture Union)

Willem A. VanGemeren. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Zondervan)



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