

# Elijah, “Troubler of Israel”

*by Bryan Gibson*

That’s how King Ahab described him (1 Kings 18:17), but Elijah immediately set him straight on who was the real troublemaker: “I have not troubled Israel, but **you and your father’s house have**, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:18). Pointing out religious error does not make you a troublemaker; teaching and practicing it does. We should thank God for men like Elijah, who boldly stand FOR what is right, and AGAINST everything contrary to it. Elijah is such a great example that we need to examine his life more closely. Let’s first review some facts about Elijah, and then consider some lessons we can learn from his life.

## **Facts**

Elijah prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel, during the period of the divided kingdom, and specifically during the wicked reign of King Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:25). Don’t forget this point, because it illustrates the difficult conditions under which Elijah labored (conditions made even worse by Ahab’s wife, Jezebel). Understanding these difficult conditions will only deepen your appreciation for his faithfulness.

Elijah and John the Baptist were a lot alike—in appearance (Matthew 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8), in “spirit and power” (Luke 1:17), and in the persecution they endured (Matthew 17:12). It’s not surprising then that when Malachi prophesied about the coming of John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6; Matthew 11:7-14), the name Elijah was actually used (Malachi 4:5).

Elijah did not die—he was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 1:1, 11), which tells us exactly how the Lord felt about him.

Elijah did make another appearance, however. Peter, James, and John saw him and Moses talking to Jesus on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:1-5). Do you remember Peter’s proposal? “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (Matthew 17:4). And do you remember the Father’s response? “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matthew 17:5).

Elijah is used to illustrate various points in the New Testament. **First**, that “no prophet is accepted in his own country,” because even though “many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah,” he was sent to a widow in the region of Sidon (Luke 4:24-26). **Secondly**, he was used to illustrate the power of prayer, that “the effective, fervent

prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16-18); and, **thirdly**, that just as God reserved a remnant in Elijah’s day, “even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:1-5).

## Lessons

When the Lord said “go,” Elijah went, and often on missions completely out of his “comfort zone”—e.g., to King Ahab, to tell him “dogs shall lick your blood” (1 Kings 21:17-22); and to King Ahaziah, to tell him “you shall surely die” (2 Kings 1:15-16). And so when the Lord tells us to go, we best get rid of our excuses and go—to the lost (Mark 16:15-16); to the brother we have sinned against (Matthew 5:23-24); to the brother who has sinned against us (Matthew 18:15); to those in need (Matthew 25:31-46); and to wherever else the Lamb may lead us (Revelation 14:4), through His example and His teaching. Like Elijah, it may require us to move out of our own “comfort zone,” but we’ve got no right to say “no” when the Lord says “go.”

Elijah was not afraid to confront those in sin, whether the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19-40), King Ahab (1 Kings 21:17-22), or King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:15-17). Courage like this comes with a price, and it certainly did for Elijah. For doing exactly what the Lord wanted, He was called an enemy (1 Kings 21:20) and a troublemaker (1 Kings 18:17), not to mention the efforts by Jezebel to put him to death (1 Kings 19:2). We could sure use more folks like Elijah today, folks with the courage to say to sinners what God wants said. Rest assured, we will be called names, too, and in some cases, serious threats may even be made; but if Elijah can endure it, so can we.

The Lord stood with Elijah, because Elijah stood up for Him. Read the account and note the different ways in which the Lord took care of Elijah, especially in 1 Kings 17 and 19. Suppose Elijah had not shown the courage he did; suppose he had been a coward instead. That would have changed everything, because the Lord does not stand with cowards; in fact, according to Revelation 21:8, cowards will have their place in the lake of fire. Again, the Lord stands with those who stand with Him. Harm may still come to us, perhaps even physical death; but if we stand with Him, He will answer our prayers (James 5:16), we will receive grace and mercy to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16), and when this life is over He will receive us to Himself (John 14:1-3). We can live with that, right?

Elijah was faithFUL when so many around him were faithLESS. Remember, Elijah lived under the reign of Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:25). Conditions were so bad that even though he was mistaken, he thought he was the only one who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:14-18). No excuses, folks. Yes, we too are surrounded by wickedness, but don’t doubt for a minute that God has provided sufficient resources to overcome these influences and live a godly life. “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus! The strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle, The next the victor’s song; To him that overcometh, a crown of life shall be; He with the King of glory shall live eternally” (*Stand up, Stand Up for Jesus*, Webb, Duffield, v. 4).