

A PROPHET'S PRAYERS ANSWERED



THIS story is about a wonderful man whose name was Elijah. Elijah was a man who served God as a prophet in Israel. All of God's prophets were his faithful servants. Elijah lived very close to God, and God heard his prayers and answered them. One reason God answered Elijah's prayers was that he prayed for the things which were pleasing to God.

Elijah lived at a time when there was a very wicked king ruling over the children of Israel. This made it a very hard time for a prophet of God. It meant that he had to tell the king he was wrong and try to make him do right, and it was very seldom that a king liked to be told he was wrong.

When Elijah first became a prophet God asked him to tell the king that there wouldn't be any rain for a long, long time. Now the reason for this was that Ahab, who was then king, was wicked. Because he followed the advice of his wife, who was a wicked woman, he had allowed the priests of the false god, Baal, to establish idol worship

among the children of Israel. That was contrary to the law of God! There was only the one true God whom they were to worship, so it was very wrong for their king to allow them to worship any other god.

So God sent Elijah to warn the king, and to tell him that there would be no more rain until the prophet said so. Now you can imagine that Ahab was very angry with Elijah. The good prophet had to run away and hide, or else he would have been killed. But God took care of him.

God always takes care of those who do what he wants them to do! And how did God take care of Elijah? Why, he told Elijah of a nice quiet place by the side of a brook. The name of the brook was Cherith. Probably it was in a cool sheltered place in the woods where Elijah could hide. While he remained there God took care of him in a most unusual way. He sent ravens to Elijah night and morning with a supply of food. Yes, these ravens brought bread and meat to the prophet twice every day. Of course he had all the water he needed from the brook. Ravens, you know, are large black birds. They are very much like our black crows. We don't think crows are so nice, but if we were very hungry and they brought us food we would think differently, wouldn't we?

Of course ravens, or crows, or any other kind of bird, wouldn't bring food to boys and girls or to men and women unless God caused them to do so. We don't know how God directed those ravens to take food to Elijah. God does many things which we do not understand. We don't understand how he makes beautiful flowers grow. We just know that he does. The Bible tells us that God caused the ravens to bring food to Elijah, so we know he did, because we know that the Bible is true. And the ravens kept right on bringing food to the prophet as long as he stayed by the side of that brook. But what do you suppose happened after awhile? You may think those ravens flew away and didn't come back. No, that wasn't it. Why, that brook dried up so there was no water in it! That was very serious, for no one can live without water, and eating bread and

meat every day must have made the prophet very thirsty, so he just had to have water.

The brook dried up because of the weather. Just as Elijah had told the wicked king Ahab, there was to be no more rain for a long time. It is the rain that keeps brooks and rivers flowing, and when there is no rain for a long, long time, the water begins to get low in brooks and rivers; and if the weather continues without rain, finally they dry up entirely. Well, that is what happened to the brook Cherith that supplied water for Elijah.

And now what was Elijah to do?

Again God took care of him. God told the prophet to move to another place. The name of the place is very hard to pronounce, but you can try to pronounce it if you wish. It was Zarephath. God told the prophet that there he would find a widow woman who would take care of him. Elijah went where God asked him to go and there he found the widow. The dry weather had also caused a famine where this widow lived, and she was nearly out of food. All she had was enough flour to make one small cake, and a little olive oil to mix with the flour.

But God was taking care of Elijah and as long as he obeyed God, everything was all right. It didn't seem like a very nice thing for a man to do, but just the same Elijah asked this poor woman for that very last bit of food that she had. He did not do this because he was selfish. No, he did it because he was putting his trust in God. God told him that this widow would take care of him, and Elijah was sure that God was able to fulfill his promise.

The widow did as Elijah asked her to do, and then what do you suppose occurred? Why, that little supply of oil never ran out! The widow kept the oil in a pitcher called a cruse, and every time she used oil from the cruse, she found more oil there to take its place. Wasn't that wonderful! And it was the same way with the flour. So day after day both the widow and the prophet were supplied with food.

Now it really wasn't difficult for God to supply flour and oil in that way. You see, he Supplies all the flour and oil and all the other food

that the whole world eats. Only he does it in a different way. He makes the grain grow, and he makes the olives grow from which we get the oil. We don't know how he makes the grain and the olives grow. We just know that he does. We don't know how God kept the widow's cruse supplied with oil, and why she never ran out of flour during that long dry spell.

This widow had a very dear son. He was just a young boy. One day that dear boy became very ill, and he died. His mother was heartbroken. At first she blamed it on Elijah, but of course Elijah had nothing to do with the boy's becoming ill and dying. But Elijah did something about it after the boy died. He carried that youngster upstairs in the widow's house, laid him down on the bed, exercised his arms, forced air into his lungs, and the boy came to life again. Wasn't that grand? Of course, it was really God who restored the boy to life. Elijah couldn't do that all by himself.

But we can imagine how happy that mother was to have her boy alive again. I like to think about that wonderful experience, for you know the Bible tells us that the time is coming when all who have died will be brought back to life again. All the boys and girls, and the grown-up folks as well, who have died are to be given life and they will be back home again with their families. That is something really worth knowing, isn't it? The power of God will do this. We know that God has power to do anything and everything he has promised to do. Yes, we know that his promises will come true! That is what the Bible tells us, and we know that the Bible is true.

It had now been three years since it had rained in the land of Israel, and the people were becoming quite worried. It was then that God told Elijah to go and show himself to King Ahab. He did this, and Ahab, of course, was very angry with the prophet, because he blamed him for the lack of rain. But Elijah made it plain to the king that the cause of all the dry weather was his own wickedness in allowing his wife to introduce the worship of the false god, Baal. Then the prophet told the king what should be done. By this time the king was so worried that he was willing to do anything that Elijah

suggested. You see, God did not keep it from raining just to make the people suffer, but to cause them to stop worshiping false gods. So this is what Elijah told them to do: all the people were to be invited to assemble on a mountain called Carmel. The priests of the false god Baal were invited to come up onto the mountain also. There were four hundred and fifty of these priests, but Elijah was the only prophet of the true God. Thousands and thousands of the people traveled up Mount Carmel as Elijah had suggested. If you were ever up on a high mountain you know what a sight that must have been to look down over the Mountainside into the valley below and watch that great multitude of people slowly making their way over the rocky, dusty trails as they moved as near to Elijah as they could get.

All day long they kept coining. What a sight!

Meanwhile, Elijah was preparing the people for a great demonstration to prove who was the true God. First he told the priests of Baal to prepare a sacrifice to their god, and then call upon him to send fire from heaven to burn the sacrifice. So they tried it, but there was no answer to their prayer. They kept shouting to Baal as loudly as they could all day long. Elijah mocked them. He said, "Cry a little louder!" suggesting that "perhaps Baal is asleep, or maybe he has gone on a journey." I suppose Elijah enjoyed that quite a bit, don't you?

Finally, as the evening drew near and the people were nearly all gathered where they could see and hear, Elijah's turn came to show what the true God could and would do. He had an altar built, and a sacrifice placed upon it. He gave orders to dig a ditch all around the altar and to fill the ditch with water. Then he told his helpers to pour water over the sacrifice and the altar. You see, he wanted the people to be convinced that the God of Israel was really the true God, the only living God with power to take care of his people. When everything was prepared to the prophet's satisfaction, he prayed to God and asked him to accept the sacrifice of the young bullock that was being offered to him, and to show that he was accepting it by causing fire to come down and burn it up.

Then followed a marvelous display of God's power. Flames of fire appeared, burning, not only the bullock, but also licking up the water that was in the ditch around the altar. When the people saw this there arose a great shout of rejoicing, proclaiming that Israel's God was the true God.

From then on things changed. To complete the work of restoring the worship of the true God in Israel, all the priests of Baal were killed. A short time after that Elijah prayed that it might rain in the land of Israel, and the rain came.

Elijah had many more wonderful experiences, and he continued to be a faithful prophet of God. He came to the end of his life in a very unusual way. When his work was finished he was standing one day by the side of the Jordan River, when suddenly there arose a mighty whirlwind. Then Elijah saw a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and the whirlwind lifted him up from the earth, and he was seen no more.

Of course Elijah died. We know that, but no one could find his body. I am telling you how Elijah died because some people think that he was taken up into heaven to live with the angels, but that is not so. We know this, because Jesus, years and years afterward, said that no one had gone up into heaven. We know that everything Jesus said is true. So let us remember that Elijah died, only that he died in a different way than most people die.

Everybody has to die now, but it won't be that way by and by. There is a time coming when no one will need to die. That is what the Bible says, and we know that the Bible is true.

QUESTIONS

- Who was the king of Israel at the time the Prophet Elijah's prayers were answered?
- Why was there no rain in the land of Israel for a long time?
- How did God feed Elijah while he lived alone by the side of a brook?

- How did God answer Elijah's prayer on a high mountain called Carmel?
- How did Elijah die?

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