

ELIJAH—ONE OF ONLY TWO MEN WHO WENT TO HEAVEN WITHOUT DYING

Presented by

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There are several prophets in the Old Testament whose names we remember, either because of their **prophecies** or because of their **actions**. The prophet Isaiah, for example, is one of the most memorable prophets because he is the one who prophesied in Isaiah 52 and 53 about “the suffering servant”—Whom we today recognize as being Jesus Christ. Jeremiah is referred to as “the weeping prophet” because he cried over the failure of the Israelites to obey God and repent of their sins. And Joel is well known to us because in chapter two of his book, he predicted the events that would take place hundreds of years later on the Day of Pentecost when the church of Christ was established.

But perhaps the Old Testament prophet who is best known for his **actions** is the man whom we know as Elijah. In 1 Kings 18, we find the historical account of Elijah’s famous competition with the prophets of the false god Baal. Almost every Bible student knows what happened on Mount Carmel when Elijah challenged those prophets to cry to their god to ask him to send fire to light the sacrifice that they had placed on top of the altar they had built. They screamed, cried, and even mutilated their bodies—but nothing happened. However, when Elijah asked God to send fire to light the sacrifice on the Israelites’ altar, God rained down fire from heaven that destroyed not only the sacrifice but the altar as well! By the time the competition was over, Elijah and the Israelites had slain all 450 of the false prophets of Baal, and according to 1 Kings 18:40 the brook Kishon at the base of Mount Carmel ran red with their blood.

One chapter earlier, in 1 Kings 17, we find the story of how, three-and-a-half years earlier, Elijah had asked God to stop sending rain because the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, had caused the people of Israel to abandon God. After Elijah’s prayer, not one drop of dew or rain fell on the land due to the people’s wickedness. After Elijah slew the false prophets of Baal, he told his servant in 1 Kings 18:43-44, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” The Bible says, “So he went up and looked, and said, ‘There is nothing.’ And seven times Elijah said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh time that the servant said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!’ So Elijah said, ‘Go say to Ahab, “Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.”’ ” Verse 45 of that same chapter then says, “Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.” Can you imagine what it must have been like to be Ahab—riding along as fast as you could so that you could try to outrun the rain, and then feeling the giant drops as they fell from the sky for the first time in three-and-a-half years? This must have been a truly **amazing** event, because James referred to it in the New Testament when he wrote, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17-18). It is no wonder that we remember Elijah with such great fondness. He was a dedicated servant of God—one whom we admire and respect even today.

But the one thing for which Elijah is perhaps best known is the fact that he was one of only two men in the whole Bible who was permitted to go to heaven without dying. In his sermon today, Blake told you about the other man, Enoch. Of him, the Bible says simply, “Enoch was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). But the Bible also tells us that Enoch enjoyed this unusual-but-pleasant ending to his life because he had “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22).

Elijah, too, “walked with God.” In fact, one of the things he did that pleased God was to train a younger prophet by the name of Elisha, who was just as faithful to God as Elijah had been. Listen to what 2 Kings 2:4-6 tells us.

“Then Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Jericho.’ But Elisha said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, **I will not leave you!**’ So they came to Jericho. Then the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came up to Elisha and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you today?’ Elisha answered, ‘Yes, I know. **Be quiet!**’ Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan.’ But Elisha said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, **I will not leave you!**’ So the two of them went on together.”

Verse 11 then says simply, “It happened that as they continued on and talked, a chariot of fire suddenly appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

I strongly suspect that, on the one hand, Elisha was very sad because his teacher and best friend had been taken away from him. But, on the other hand, he probably was very happy for Elijah, because the old prophet’s dreams and goals had finally come true. He had gotten to go to heaven to be with God, Whom he had served so long and so faithfully. Elisha’s loss was heaven’s gain!

Now it was **Elisha’s turn** to spend his life working for God. In 2 Kings 2:13, the Bible says, “The spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha.” Elijah had done his job well. The old prophet had taught the young prophet how to obey God. Now it was the young prophet Elisha’s turn to be the teacher. This is exactly what the apostle Paul did with the young man Timothy. He taught him how to be a faithful Christian and how to obey God. Then, shortly before Paul died, he said to Timothy, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

Blake and I have begun to figure out that this is why those of you in this audience are trying to get us to study hard and learn God’s Word well. You want us to be like Elisha and Timothy, so that when the time comes, we can take your place and teach others all the things you have taught us. We may not get to see anyone taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. But we **can** be like Elisha, Paul, and Timothy—and have “the spirit of Elisha rest on us.” If we are “faithful unto death” (Revelation 2:10), we will one day get to meet Elijah and Enoch in person—the only two men in the whole Bible who got to go to heaven without dying. But more important, **we** will get to live in heaven, too. I hope that when we get there, you will all be waiting for us so you can welcome us to that wonderful place. I am looking forward to being there forever with God, with Christ, and with you.