Elijah

Elijah is a prophet from Tishbe. He is the prophet Jesus mentioned more times than other prophets. Therefore his story in the OT might be more important for us to study. He was a prophet during the reign of Aha, the seventh king of Israel, one of the evilest kings in Israel. It can be realized that it was not easy for a person to maintain his devotion to God in such an upheaval period of time. His name is "My God is Jehovah" or "Jehovah is God," which may tell us his parents were God-oriented Israelites. Without having such strong belief that "Jehovah is God," it is impossible for Elijah to bear the following passages.

He might be a man of standing in Israel because he was able to meet the king, and was paid homage by Obadiah, the second in command in Israel. But such status did not give him a better life quality, instead full of challenges. This is no surprise to a man called by God for rough services.

In the passage for this study, there are four major miraculous events we will look at. But among them, Mt. Carmel probably is the one so astounding that attracts most of readers' attention.

The story begins with a devastating message from God related to Aha and Israelites, and Elijah was asked to confront Aha with the message. Such confrontation might kill Elijah. Most of Christians would rather reject than obey, eg., Moses, Jonah and etc., but he went from Tishbe to Samaria to deliver the message. Then the Lord sent him away to Kerith Ravine to hide from the life threat. Interestingly enough, the Lord commanded ravens to feed him. Raven is one of the unclean birds according to Lev.11:15 and Deut. 14:14. A prophet is supposed not touch such unclean thing, and yet the Lord fed him through such bird. Can you find a similar story in the NT.? Acts 10:15. From here you may see Elijah's understanding of God's doing might be better than Apostle Peter. Besides, raven is a kind of voracious bird. They do not even feed their youth. But God used them to do feeding. I believe Elijah once experienced such impossibility would never forget God's ability of providing. God's doing is always beyond human's understanding. That is why we have no way to understand Him except by faith.

Elijah is an energetic evangelist, but was asked by the Lord to retreat from public attention until the brook dried up. This must have been a long while. I believe this should be a lesson for Christians. Are you willing to be quiet or ignored in a church even if you are a man of feats? Another thing might be interesting to you is that Elijag was provided two meals a day, instead of three. This might tell us biblical figures only ate two meals a day. If two meals a day works fine with people of the old time, we, as people of nowadays, have no reason not to practice eat less, or fasting. Many of us today care so much about meal schedule, but little on fasting schedule.

Of course, the Lord was responsible for food supply to Elijah. And so when the water ran out, the Lord provided another mechanism of food supply to him. But this time, it shocked Elijah again, and probably more than the first time. It was a widow! She was poor even to the point of death, a Gentile contemptible to Israelite. Why not a rich family, why not an honorable person? Elijah was a highly regarded person in his country, but he was once supported by an unclean animal, and now a poor and gentile widow?! If this is known to his people, it might become a laughing stock?! Elijah might have asked such question in heart, but he showed obedience again. And he was honored to be the first evangelist for the gentiles. There is only one reason for this: He understood God's doing. To serve poor or lowly might be ok because you have love, but to be served and supported by the lowly is different, which might hurt your ego a lot. Elijah was trained both. The latter is even more difficult for Christians to learn than the former.

In the passage of this widow one might notice the miracle of flour and oil, but there is another miracle no less than this one: widow's kindness toward a foreigner. Yes, such extraordinary kindness is an incredible miracle that human can practice. You see not only God can do miracles, but we can also. That is, God leaves certain miracles in our hand that we can do it by will. Interestingly enough, God himself sometimes even discredits his own miracles, but he honors those who practice such miracle. A widow with two penny in a synagogue is an example. So you should be aware that how God values our miracles. *Matthew 10*:*41and* 42 tell us how Jesus views such kindness miracle: "*He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."*

However, something seemly got wrong soon. The woman's son got sick and died. And bitterly enough, Elijah got blamed for this case. Here we noticed three things as follows,

1. Woman's faith failed when her only love on earth was gone. This is not something new to most of us. Not every one of us can have Abraham's faith, and I believe the Lord accepts our weakness. But we need to be honest before the Lord and church if our faith is more or like the widow's.
2. Elijah's response to such devastating situation. At receiving misunderstanding from the woman, he did not defend himself or used any biblical word to comfort her, instead, he brought the boy in and prayed. If Elijah is not a prayer evangelist, he can not act this way. Many of us would just use lip service rather than prayer.
3. This is very likely a new Christian may encounter when he/she practices the new faith. A new Christian may have delusion that once accepting Jesus every thing will come out right. But unfortunately, many of such Christians will experience what the widow experienced. That is, the situation may even get worse when he/she accept Jesus. This is also a frequent challenge for the Christian who brought the new Christian to Jesus. Note, We must not think it strange if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God, as the case of the woman's child.
4. This is the first miracle of life restoration in the whole Bible. Therefore you can imagine how great Elijah was regarded in the Bible. If life can be restored, what fear do we have to loose the life for the Lord? But take notice that in the whole 5 thousand years, such miracle only happened four times. Therefore, do not believe it will happen in your life time even you have faith of Elijah. It serves only one purpose: to assure you God has power over death and you will be back to life at His promise at the Day.

The drought continued on and Aha was forced to seek grass for his horses and mules. Notice here that he was not doing his for his people, but for the animals. So now you should understand something.

Here there was a man, Obadiah, mentioned. Obadiah means "servant of Jehovah," and he did good job for the priests of the Lord. Obadiah took advantage of his office and did good to the Lord's people. He risked his office and even life when needed. Have you practiced your faith by doing evangelistic work at job, or you just focus on your own goal for your work, and only doing church thing at church?

And once again, Elijah was asked to present himself to the king who

cares the animals rather than people. As a servant of God, life threatening is not supposed to be something weird. And they met at Mt. Carmel which is a northwest-southeast-trending limestone ridge, about 26 km long, it covers an area of about 245 sq km. Its seaward point, Rosh ha-Karmel (Cape Carmel), almost reaches the Mediterranean; there the coastal plain is only 180 m wide. The mountain's highest point, 1,791 ft above sea level, is northwest of the village of 'Isfiya. Sanctified since early times, Mt. Carmel is mentioned as a "holy mountain" in Egyptian records of the 16th century BC. As a "high place," it was long a center of idol worship, and its outstanding reference in the Bible is as the scene of Elijah's confrontation with the false prophets of Baal (I Kings 18). Mt. Carmel was also sacred to the early Christians; individual hermits settled there as early as the 6th century AD. The Carmelites, a Roman Catholic monastic order, were founded in 1150; they received their first rule, or laws and regulations governing the conduct of their order, in 1206-14. Their monastery (rebuilt 1828) is near the traditional site of Elijah's miracle.

And there Elijah met with 450 Baal prophets. This was incredible account. However, this was kind of the way the Lord did to show his majesty and power. Christians are fewer than pagans here today in Taiwan, and seems we are in an unfavorable position, but the story of Mt. Carmel should present a better understanding to you of God’s deeds.

Here Elijah displayed marvelous power before Israelites and he alone routed 450 rival prophets. Positioned yourself in such a scene as Elijah, and how you will feel? Great, isn’t it? But here a problem of a human being is demonstrated. Elijah’s confidence might be shifted from God alone to the miracle itself. And even worse, with such miracle, Aha’s attitude toward Elijah might have been changed. Elijah wanted to take advantage of the side effect of the miracle and strengthened the favorable impression upon Aha by running ahead of Aha. That was a way used in that time for a person to please his king. Seems reasonable, right? But the outcome turned out to be shocking Elijah. Instead of receiving an award from Aha, he received a imminent life threat. This really upset him very much. Now lets have some understanding of this first. Firstly, it is never right for a Christian, especially an evangelist, to flatter his/her evil boss. Secondly, the heart of an evil person like Aha or Jezebel is never unstable. They might be good to you today, but raging against you tomorrow. It is very energy wasting for us to pay attention to them in order to please them. Therefore, we do what the Lord asks us to do,

and relax.

This is also a good picture of most of Christians leaders who might experience. And what this tells us is there is no giant Christian. We are but dust. Therefore, never put your trust in a seemingly great Christian figure or on the great miraculous performance you have done.

Therefore Elijah fled to Beersheba from Jezeel. That was a long journey. He was upset and felt lonely in such evangelical journey. He might have complaint in heart thinking God was unfair to him. But he might also have forgotten that he tried to utilize the miracle which was God'' to win a favor from Aha for himself. God as well as his miracle can not be utilized. The miracle is only designed for his own glory, not for human's selfish gain.

And God corrected him further more by revealing the fact, in addition to Elijah, there were 7,000 people who were as zealous as Elijah for the Lord, too. This is a good lesson for us for there is a time we may stumble over the trap by thinking you are the only one who has greater heart for the Lord and evangelization. This is a common unhealthy symptom of an evangelist who may feel lonely of doing evangelism, but here the Lord taught Elijah that he is not alone. Not only does the Lord promise to be with evangelists but also provides other evangelists ready for the work. There is a Chinese spiritual song, "Holy Spirit brings you and me on the way, and we promise to each other that we will never make U turn. Having gone through rain and storm, you will be surprised to find out there are other people like you are walking on the same road you are walking."

1 Ki.18:28 is exactly what Taiwan witchcraft is doing. It is not surprised to find out great similarity in all religions' practices. Provide a picture from Babylon mystery depicting of Catholics' practice of bowing and kissing an idol.

However, such a long trip still does not feel him comfortable yet. He wanted to continue on. Poor guy. Well, this is always a problem for an attention-shifted person, never feels secure until he put his trust back in God. But fortunately Elijah's faith foundation is strong enough because he knew where he should go, Mt. Sinai. There he threw all his complaint or pressure to God. This is good, for 1 Peter 5:7 says "Cast all your anxiety upon him, for he cares for you." And as a father the Lord used to be, the Lord corrected Elijah with gentle heart. Elijah's attention was then caught, and without delay, he returned back the way he came from. We may like Elijah once in a while loose our attention

to God, but if we can learn from Elijah by seeking God's dwelling first, then the strength and faith will be returned soon.

So Elijah returned even further to Damascus to anoint two kings and one prophet. Elijah might be depressed of lack of justice in Israel, but now God's final judgment was revealed and Elijah would be the one to initiate the judgment over a stubborn and unrepentant people. Elijah's heart might be satisfied.

Quiz:

1. Who is another one who did not die in flesh, but taken to heaven while alive?
2. Please simulate Elijah's prayer posture in 1 Ki.18:42?
3. Why Elijah was sent to Zarepath, instead of Israel, to help a widow there? Cf. Lk4:25.
4. Why Elijah ran for life from Jezeel to Beersheba?
5. Count the miracles happened in the account of the widow. A. The woman gave what Elijah asked for in her poverty. This is a miracle of faith. 2. Her bread and oil multiplied. The meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending. Terry's story on committing to give offering to missionaries during his time of needing money, such as paying car, house loan and etc. , and yet, his salary multiplied twice.
6. Which verse says Elijah is a prophet? V.18:22.
7. What is your observation about Elijah's characters?
8. Instead of just killing Elijah, why Jezebel warned him first?