

THE STORY
STUDY 15
CHAPTER 15

The Story so far ...

The story opens with Elijah telling king Ahab that it will not rain for several years. Elijah then runs and hides and God miraculously looks after him.

Elijah is sent back to Ahab after three years to tell him it will rain soon. Ahab accuses Elijah of being a trouble maker. Elijah says no, on the contrary, it's the king's disobedience that is the cause of the trouble.

Elijah sets up the challenge with the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel. Each is to offer a bull on the altar. They would pray for their god to answer by sending fire. The prophets of Baal pray all day – no fire. Elijah then gets them to douse the altar of the Lord with water. He then prays and the Lord sends the fire which consumes everything, and demonstrates that The Lord – He is God. The prophets of Baal are slaughtered.

Elijah predicts rain, but has an agonising wait for the Lord to send the rain. He then sends Ahab back to Jezreel by chariot, then, by the power of the Spirit, runs ahead of Ahab.

Queen Jezebel then threatens to kill Elijah who, unexpectedly, after witnessing the power of God on Mt Carmel, runs in fear for his life. He stops in the wilderness where he asks God to take his life.

Once again God miraculously feeds Elijah and sends him on a long journey to Horeb – Mt Sinai. Elijah is depressed and full of self pity. God meets with Elijah and encourages him.

Elijah is sent back to anoint a king in Aram, a King in Israel, and also to anoint Elisha as his successor. God assures Elijah further that there are another 7000 who, like him, have remained faithful to the Lord.

Elijah goes to Elisha, who is ploughing. He places his cloak on him. This shows that Elisha will succeed Elijah as the prophet of the Lord. Elisha responds by using his plough as wood to offer his oxen as a sacrifice to the Lord. By doing this, he was “burning his bridges”. In other words, when Elisha followed the call of God he made sure that he would not be tempted to return to his former way of life.

A series of wicked kings follow King Ahab. And then God tells Elijah that he is about to die.

Elijah and Elisha set off. Elijah tests Elisha by telling Elisha to let him go alone, but Elisha won't. He will not leave Elijah. Elijah asks Elisha what he can give him, and Elisha responds by asking for a double portion of Elijah's power. This of course is only the Lord's to give, and Elijah makes this clear by saying that if Elisha sees Elijah go – which can only happen if the Lord wills it – then his request will have been granted.

They miraculously cross the Jordan. Elisha sees Elijah go. He picks up Elijah's fallen cloak, and is able to cross the Jordan miraculously, showing that he has Elijah's power.

Elisha continues where Elijah left off. He is given the use of a room by a childless Shunammite woman. He assures her that she and her husband will have a son – they do, but later the son dies. Elisha miraculously brings the son back to life.

We have the incident of Naaman, an Aramean commander, being miraculously healed. Elisha told him to dip 7 times in the Jordan River and on coming out the 7th time he was healed.

Elisha angered the king of Aram by alerting the King of Israel to the Aramean troop movements. The king of Aram sets out to capture Elisha and corners him at Dothan. Elisha prays for the temporary blindness of the Aramean troops. He leads them to the capital of the enemy country – Samaria – where he feeds them and lets them go.

The Lord used Elisha through the reigns of many kings, until his death.

The prophets Amos succeeded Elisha. His message was one of judgement, with a plea to repent.

Hosea followed Amos. His is a heart wrenching message as he pleads with Israel to return and respond to the love and faithfulness of the Lord. Failure to do so would mean judgement.

God's people in the Northern Kingdom of Israel continue to refuse to respond.

1. What do we learn about faith from Elijah's ups (victory over the prophets of Baal) and his downs (depression in the desert)?

Faith is never in the abstract. Faith isn't something one talks about, as an abstract concept. Faith can only be spoken of in the context of life. As James said: "I will show you my faith by what I do."

Elijah was a person of faith. James in fact holds Elijah up as a person of faith. So that he was a person of faith is not disputed. So it may come as a shock/disappointment/let down to see him running scared in the face of Jezebel's threats, to hear him whining about wanting to die!

What do we learn about faith from Elijah? We can be up today and down tomorrow. That is how faith – and the life of faith – works! So if you have up days and down days, then welcome to the club of human beings!!

Note though that God didn't let Elijah down. And note that Elijah needed to respond to God's promptings. And, it isn't stated, but when God told Elijah to get up and get going, my sense is that it was too soon for Elijah to be feeling like he wanted to. So sometimes we will have "behave our way into feeling/believing"! Because if we wait till we feel like it before we do something, well, we might never do it!

2. God revealed himself to Elijah in a gentle whisper. What does this tell you about God's character and methods of communication?

I am not sure if we should say that God will always whisper. I think that God will use whatever means is appropriate to the occasion. But the principle from this is that God may come to us in ways we do not expect. Elijah, in his depressed state, might have thought the wind and fire were better ways for God to speak to him. Especially in a depressed state when God uses loud means to speak to us, it is easier to hear him. But God chose to speak in a whisper. God often speaks in the unexpected way. Think of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. They thought they would drown. And when Jesus came they nearly missed him – he came walking on the water. Thought they had seen a ghost. Mary in the Garden: She thought Jesus was the gardener – nearly missed him. John the Baptist – he wanted Jesus to tell him if he was the One. Instead of a direct answer, Jesus told John's disciples to tell John what he, Jesus was doing, and for John to put that together with what the OT taught, and to work it out for himself from there that it had to be Jesus because only Jesus would do those things. Jesus does speak in unexpected and sometimes obscure ways.

And yet, Thomas stated quite plainly that he wanted to see Jesus hands and side, and only then would he believe. And Jesus offered him exactly that – the equivalent of a "shout"!

God knows what we need. He knows what will be helpful. And he will communicate with us in an appropriate way.

3. What steps can we take to hear the gentle whisper of God?

We need to be in regular contact with God. Intentionally present to Him. We do not want to miss the "whisper" in whatever form the whisper takes. When we are young Christians, God tends to do less whispering and more "shouting" because we are not yet schooled in the ways of hearing God. But as we mature in our faith we will need more discernment – "without faith it is impossible to please God (**Heb 11:6**). God will build up our faith. So, spend time with Him.

4. In what ways did the prophet Elisha live a life of faith?

We had several illustrations of his faith – Naaman, purifying a spring of fresh water, raising the Shunammite's son from the dead. But what set the tone was the fact that when he was called, he made his intentions clear. There would be no turning back. He burned his plough and sacrificed the oxen. That was a huge step of faith. He himself had not been mentored by Elijah or anything. He simply stepped out in faith, with no turning back.

5. Identify the ways God was faithful to Elisha?

God gave Elisha the desire of his heart – a double portion of Elijah’s power. Elijah had made it clear to Elisha that it wasn’t his to give, but if God wanted to give it, He would, and he would know that God had given it if God allowed Elisha to witness Elijah’s leaving. We are not told, but doubtless Elijah said this under divine direction.

The mantle of Elijah was left behind. This must have been an encouraging sign to Elisha – he had his mentor’s cloak. When they first met, Elijah had put the cloak on Elisha’s shoulders, showing him God’s call. Now it has his permanently.

God allowed Elisha to see that he had Elijah’s power soon after Elijah had left – he retraced their steps to the Jordan and the river parted for him too.

The prophets from the prophet school witnessed this, thus showing to them that Elisha was divinely accredited for this task.

We have several instances of Elisha using his prophetic powers – God was faithful to Elisha as he had been to Elijah.

6. How has God been faithful to you?

Ask the group for a recent testimony of God’s faithfulness. It is always helpful if you can start by giving a testimony. And “ordinary” is helpful, because then the group will be more likely to share their “ordinary” testimonies too! We are looking for God’s faithfulness in the ordinary – we want to be sensitive to what God is doing. He is always at work. We are not always aware because “He comes in ways we are not expecting.”

7. What specific message of social justice and spiritual faithfulness do you think the prophets Amos and Hosea would proclaim today?

Amos speaks about “oppression among the people of Samaria” and about judgement even of the “foreign” nation. God sees and will judge even those who do not name Him as Lord. And if He did it to people who are not His own, how much more to those who name Him as Lord? And we know what to do: Seek good, not evil; hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.

We are not a nation, we are the Church. But we can know that God will ultimately balance the scales of justice. We have been put into a society, given a place of influence – big or small – and we are to be salt and light.

Hosea speaks about no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God, cursing, lying murder, stealing, adultery. Where Amos’ message was more about social justice, Hosea’s is more about spiritual faithfulness. God expects that from His people.