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# **Under the Juniper Tree**

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**Series: Living Legends - Part 3**



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# Under the Juniper Tree

It was, perhaps, the greatest act of bravery recorded on Old Testament scrolls. One man against an army of heathen priests. One man's God against all the power of the occult. One man's faith against all the religious superstition the world could muster.

That man's name was Elijah. He was God's man, called into God's service, to do God's will. Prepared by a drying brook, tested by an angry widow and her dying son, this man had been baked in the oven of adversity until he was able to stand on a mountaintop and believe that his God could do anything.

So he challenged those heathen fanatics to a spiritual duel. He decided to pit the Eternal God against all other gods, the Spirit of the Living God against the evil spirits that have inhabited this world since the fall; and he decided to do it so dramatically, that an entire nation would be left with no doubt as to the outcome.

Atop Mount Carmel he climbed. There, with 450 of Baal's prophets staring him in the face, not to mention another 400 prophets of Asheroth, who sat at the Queen's table, this man of courage pointed his finger of judgment at that satanic host and dared them to build an altar, lay an ox on that altar, and call out to their gods to set it aflame. Elijah agreed to do the same. Then, whichever god sent fire from heaven, the whole nation could acknowledge as "The God". The Baalites had their turn at bat first. All day long they screamed and cried for their gods to light the match that would win the prize. Nothing. Prompted by a little sarcasm from our hero, they became literally frantic by day's end. Cutting themselves with knives until the blood gushed forth, screaming at the top of their lungs to awaken their sleeping deity, still they came away empty-handed.

Now it was Elijah's turn. Literally soaking the offering with water, so that it could not burn, God's man even filled the trench around the offering with water. Then he prayed. Not a long prayer. Most effective prayers in Scripture were not long prayers. He simply acknowledged who God was, what the problem was,

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and what he believed to be the Will of God. Then he asked God to step in and do what only He could do.

And God did. A flashing ray of fire flew forth from the heavens, literally consuming the offering, the wood, and even the rocks themselves, licking up the water in the trench as it went. And on the authority of that kind of miracle, the crowd, to a man, fell to the ground and cried, “The Lord, He is God; The Lord, He is God.” A shocked band of heathens, exhausted from their long day of fruitless religiosity, verbally acknowledged the Lordship of the Living God.

If you or I were writing the story, it would end there. We would have a “Hollywood type finale”, with our hero riding off into the sunset to the strains of “Marching to Zion”, as these former enemies of God lay crouched in the dust, crying “The Lord, He is God”. Then the credits would zoom up on the screen, and everyone would live happily ever after. Why, our man Elijah would be the talk of every hero-worshipper for generations to come. What courage! What tenacity! What authority!

But, of course, God does not write for Hollywood. He tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In fact, He is the Truth. So, when He etches on the tablets of history the story of a man, He tells it like it is. He gives you the gory, along with the glory. He gives you the whole story. The reason is, God’s Word isn’t designed to create characters, but rather to reveal character, both good and bad.

So we must continue in our study of Elijah. We cannot stop with the drumbeats in the background and the trumpets casting their shrill announcements of his victory in the distance. We must go on inside the man and see the man from yet another perspective. To that end we continue our quest for reality, from the life of this living legend.

Today’s story is taken from I Kings, Chapters 18 and 19. The title: Under the Juniper Tree.

I- A Word on the Weather (I Kings 18: 40-46)

II- A Word from the Queen (I Kings 19: 1-2)

III- A Word about the Prophet (I Kings 19: 3-8)

### I- A WORD ON THE WEATHER

This whole scenario began, you may recall, with a dramatic weather forecast. Our man for all seasons, Mr. Elijah, had

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appeared on the scene totally unannounced, and he announced to the king himself that, due to an atmospheric change brought about by the anger of the Living God at Mr. King and his kingdom, there would be no rain in the forecast for an indefinite period of time. No rain. Not even a drop of dew would greet the morning sun. And then, as quickly as he appeared, he disappeared, and left his arid legacy to run its course. There is so much we do not know about the why and the how of this rainless forecast. James tells us that this man Elijah knew how to pray. In fact, he prayed so effectually and so fervently, that it didn't rain on the earth for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, and the heavens gave forth with showers from on high. So it all had something to do with the faith of this most magnificent man.

Now God has done what He intended to do. He withheld the water to get the attention of the people so He could demonstrate to the people who He was. It worked. Now what? Now this—I Kings 18:

And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."

Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

Now Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower."

So Ahab went up to eat and drink. But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth, and put his face between his knees.

And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go back" seven times.

And it came about at the seventh time, that he said, "Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, "Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you."

So it came about in a little while, that the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel.

Then the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel.

(I Kings 18:39-46 NASB)

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At first glance, Elijah's initial move might seem rather harsh. He gathered all of Baal's prophets (all 450 of them), and hauled them wholesale down to the brook Kishon, where he proceeded to murder them in cold blood. That does not sound like brotherly love. And today's interpretations that seek to apply personal admonitions to national situations would have a problem with this passage.

The greater principle involved, however, is the principle of completed warfare. Always God instructed His people to know who His enemies were, and when engaged in warfare with them over Jehovah's authority, they were to "take no prisoners". They were to finish them off. They were never to take the enemy into their camp and try to coexist with them. When they did the results were always disastrous.

God could have left these passages out of Scripture; but He chose rather to demonstrate through them, using Israel as His picture book, graphic principles of how national and spiritual warfare should be conducted. In this case, the application is vital. Spiritual victories must be complete. You and I are never to toy with the enemy as though he were no longer our enemy. God may have, for instance, delivered you from a satanic stronghold of drugs or alcohol. That does not mean you are now free to toy with those things again. If you have been freed from those things, you do whatever it takes to see that you never again are tempted to touch them. Because God isn't strong enough to deliver you? No. Because "thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God". You don't win the victory, then invite the enemy back into your living room. You destroy every semblance of his presence, every reminder of the bitter herbs of destruction he caused you to consume.

If certain kinds of reading material were once a serious problem in your life, destroy every temptation that might come your way in that area of your life before it is allowed to become a problem again. Don't give the enemy an advantage by leaving him around to tempt you. Elijah didn't, and you musn't.

So the battle is over. God has annihilated the enemy. Elijah has seen to it that those the enemy used to slander the name of God have been destroyed as well. Now it is time for Elijah to see that the circumstances God used to bring about this whole experience are brought back to normal. It could have been automatic. It could have simply started to rain the moment fire

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fell, or the moment the last of Satan's host were slain. But it didn't. It doesn't. It was necessary for Elijah to ask God to make it rain again. James tells us that. And the passage at hand tells us how it happened.

Elijah returned to Mount Carmel, the place of victory, and there, his head between his knees, he prayed. And he waited. Seven times (signaling completeness), he sent his servant to look for even a sign of precipitation. Six times he returned with the same weather report that had dominated Israel for 42 months. Ah, but the seventh time! The seventh time Elijah's servant reported a tiny cloud, a cloud but the size of a man's hand coming over from above the sea. That was all the sign God's man needed. He sent word to Ahab to be sure his convertible top wasn't leaking and to be sure he had rain tires on his chariot, because at long last, showers of blessing were on their way.

All through Scripture that truth is repeated again and again. Our God controls the elements. Satan uses them when God allows it. But if God deems that it shall not rain, Lucifer can't squeeze out an ounce of moisture, no matter how hard he tries. And Beloved, when it's time for God's gentle, cooling drops of love to fall into your life, nothing Satan can do can keep it from happening. It was time for the love of God to touch this planet again, sending much needed nourishment to the ground, rebalancing the course of nature, and replenishing the springs of mercy God has placed on this earth to nurture us and care for us. And once again, Satan was powerless to stop Him. The rain belongs to God. He sends it as He wills to caress the trees, bathe the flowers, cleanse the earth, feed the soil. So whenever you hear the weather report on the late news, think of the power of Almighty God, and stop for a moment and worship. Man can report the weather, but only God can control the weather; therefore, not even man can predict the weather. The clouds in the heavens belong to the God of the heavens, and He uses them as He sees fit.

### II- A WORD FROM A QUEEN

Now the life of our legend takes a completely different turn. We have seen him beside a drying brook, trusting God for his daily bread. We have seen him in a widow's house, trusting God to raise the dead. We have seen him on a mountaintop, trusting God to send fire from heaven. We have seen him on his knees, trusting God to send rain from heaven. We have seen a man of

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courage, a man of integrity, a man of authority, and a man of faith.

Now we see the same man, physically and emotionally exhausted, just after the big battle. He has, in one day, confronted the enemy in a national showdown, supervised the extermination of 450 satanic priests, and personally agonized before God until a three and one-half year drought gave way to perhaps the most refreshing showers in history. That would constitute a lifetime for the most active man in the world. God's man has seen it all compressed into a matter of hours.

The drain of it all and the strain of it all must have taken its toll on Elijah. Because suddenly, now at the point in his life where he has witnessed more of God's power than almost any other man who ever lived, he suddenly succumbs to fear and loneliness and self-pity until he literally destroys his ministry. And it all begins with a telegram, a telegram from the meanest woman on planet earth. We must read on in I Kings 19:

Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

(I Kings 19:1,2 NASB)

Our big, bad monarch now runs home to momma to give her the news. We can sort of imagine the conversation as King Kong pulls his Mercedes up into the driveway at the palace. Perhaps it went something like this:

Jezy: "You're late for dinner, again, 'hubby'. Where have you been? And don't give me that the chariot broke down nonsense."

Ahab: "Well, it hasn't been your typical day, dear."

Jezy: "Tell momma about it, love; and why in the world are you carrying an umbrella? Those things went out of fashion three years ago."

Ahab: "Well, it all began about 6 o'clock this morning. You simply won't believe what you're about to hear. Remember that prophet of Jehovah who barged in here about three years ago, and put an end to our water supply? Well, he up and shows up again, and lo and behold, he saunters up to Mount Carmel and..."

And so Ahab unfolds the whole sad story to Jezebel. Her face

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becomes red with anger. But it isn't until the king gets to the part about Elijah personally executing all 450 of Jezzy's priests that the wicked witch of the east literally explodes.

"He what?" she screams at the top of her lungs. "He killed them all? Abbey? Benny? Nathan? Samuel? Fritz? (Fritz?). And you stood there and let him? You...you...royal wimp, you! Just wait till I get my hands on that Bible thumpin' conservative. I'll tear his eyes out!"

"Now, dear," the rapidly aging king might have responded, "don't do anything you'll be sorry for. Remember, his God just wiped out your entire religious system in one day."

"Exactly!" she must have answered. "And I plan to do likewise by sundown tomorrow."

Whether that was exactly the scenario we do not know. What we do know, however, is that within minutes a telegram was on its way to the Jezreel Hilton, where Elijah was hoping to spend his first restful night in months. At last, a real bed. At last, room service that included more than a widow's last bite of bread, served on a plate a little cleaner than a raven's beak. He was just settling down for his anchovy pizza with a side order of chili, when there was a knock on the door.

He opens it. He thinks it might be that banana split he's ordered for dessert. But it's none other than the Queen Bee's delivery boy, and what he has in his hand isn't edible. It's a scorching, hand-written note, signed with the queen's own seal, threatening the bravest man on earth with extinction before the little hand on his Mickey Mouse watch comes back tomorrow, to where it is right now.

He should have had a hearty laugh, told the queen's Western Union helper that it was the queen that was heading for the last roundup, and gone back to his anchovies and root beer. He should have. But something had happened inside of Elijah since that incredible moment on Mount Carmel. Something inside of him snapped. And all the confidence he had exhibited in his invincible God suddenly turned to mush. Listen to his response in I Kings 19:

And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

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But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a Juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

And he lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.

And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you."

So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.  
(I Kings 19:3-8 NASB)

### III- A WORD ABOUT THE PROPHET

Here was the man most likely to be voted "Man of the Year" by *Time* magazine. Here was the man most likely to win the Giddyup of Gallup or whatever poll was taken that year as the bravest man on planet earth. Here was the man whose very name sent cold chills down the spines of every Baal-loving countryman in the Mideast. He was more idolized than the Most Valuable Player in the Jerusalem Super Bowl. His name was synonymous with "bravery, courage, and power".

And as long as he was forced to be totally dependent on his God, realizing that, in and of himself he could do nothing, he was invincible. But now, he was a hero. Now he had arrived. Now, he was the chairman of the board. And for a brief moment, in his exhaustion and in his moment of victory, he took his eyes off the Living God, and placed them on the circumstances instead.

This man had just personally executed all 450 of this woman's staff; there was no earthly or heavenly reason for him to be afraid of her. And he had just seen his God miraculously declare Himself to be God, at the total expense of the gods this woman claimed to be appealing to. So even using human reasoning, the last thing you would expect our man to do is up and run.

But Satan usually knows when we are vulnerable. And two of the yardsticks he apparently uses are our "exhaustion factor" and our "victory letdown". By exhaustion factor, I mean he knows

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the level at which our minds and bodies are depleted until they no longer can think or respond rationally. By the victory letdown, I mean he knows when we are on a spiritual high from answered prayer or a visible spiritual victory. In either case, when these factors exist, Satan almost always sneaks in with a temptation that apart from these issues, wouldn't entangle us.

When both factors exist, only grace can save us from his wiles. Elijah simply wasn't ready for this. No kind of exhaustion could match his. And no kind of victory could have been more exciting. So, here he was, on top of the world, but totally worn out, just waiting for the enemy to call. And call he did. So Elijah left his pizza half-eaten, jumped in his battered jeep, and headed for no-man's land. Arriving at Beersheba, he left his servant and headed alone into the wilderness. Had he been running to be alone with God and worship, the wilderness would not have been a bad place to be. But he was running because he was afraid, and that made the wilderness a place of wandering.

Now Elijah begins to pray. That's not normally a bad move, either. But this was not the prayer of faith that had echoed from his heart on Mount Carmel. This was the kind of prayer most of us pray when depression begins to set in. He prayed: "Lord, I'm no good. Just let me die. I'm no better than my fathers were; just take me home to Glory. Amen." Now you may be laughing. I'm not. I've prayed that prayer. I understand a little of this man's heart. He was tired. He was afraid. He was hurting. That does not justify his faithlessness. But it does explain it. In the next lesson or two, we will unfortunately watch his depression develop and his future dissolve. For now, suffice it to say, he was one discouraged, fearful prophet, and all he wanted to do was go to sleep and wake up in Heaven.

God wasn't going to desert him, though. And that's important. No matter how lonely you feel, at that time God is closer to you than ever, trying desperately to comfort you. So God sent an angel to minister to his fleeing prophet. The angel cooked him a little lunch, told him to eat it; he did, and he turned over for forty winks. Just like they do in the hospital though, when you finally get to sleep, the angel, who must have been to nursing school, woke Elijah up to get him to eat again. That was necessary, for it would be a while before our hero got his next meal...quite a while.

We'll take up there in our next study. But isn't it sad that

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the story didn't end with chapter eighteen? No, I don't think so. I can identify with Elijah better now than I could before. He looked like some kind of cardboard saint who never experienced reality before. Now I know what James meant when he said, "He was a man with like passions such as we have." That makes the stay by that drying brook more incredible. That makes the weeks in Zarephath more exciting. That makes the Mount Carmel Festival extraordinary indeed. Here was a man just like us. Yet a loving, patient God took him, and trained him, and equipped him, and used him as few men on earth have ever been used. It says a lot for Elijah. It says even more for God.

He's in the business of using imperfect vessels to magnify His perfect name. He's in the business of pouring His strength into bodies of weakness, so nothing but His strength can be seen. Until now, we thought God simply found the Superman of the Mideast and latched on to him. Now we see this was Clark Kent at best, until the Living Spirit of God entered his life and made him strong.

So there is hope for you. There is even hope for me. We have a God who isn't looking for supermen or wonder women, but for plain folks, who sometimes get depressed, sometimes get impatient, sometimes get afraid, sometimes seem ungrateful. He's looking to take them by some drying brooks, into their own Zarephaths, and even some to their own Mount Carmels, as well. Because they're perfect? No. Because they're His.

Elijah was afraid. And sometimes, so are we. And as we sit pouting, under life's juniper trees, may we just look over our shoulder. There, sure enough, is an angel of God. He's toasting something on the fire. He's comforting us. He's telling us that our God understands. And He cares.

### UNDER THE JUNIPER TREE

There under the juniper tree, sometimes you and I  
Sit, like poor Elijah, just wanting to mope and cry,  
Wanting God to understand just how tough things are,  
Wanting to feel alone and sad, withdrawing to be afar.

There under the juniper tree, sometimes you and I  
Even, like poor Elijah, tell God we want to die.  
It's so much fun to draw apart, and cry and moan and groan,  
To run away, and then bemoan the fact that we're alone.

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But there, under the juniper tree, if only we would see  
A loving angel's touching us; He longs to set us free.  
He offers to us Living Bread and tells us to be still;  
He offers there to comfort us; to rest us, if we will.

There under the juniper tree, the choice is really ours;  
We can sit and mope and weep for hours and hours and hours,  
Or we can fill the heavens with the sound of joyful prayers  
That even under a juniper tree, we have a God who cares!

### For Application and Further Study

1- Do you see a pattern of the times when Satan seems to sneak up on you, either when you're tired or just after a spiritual victory? How can you prepare for those onslaughts?

2- What one thing changed Elijah's perspective of life? What safeguards can you place in your life to keep that from happening?

3- What relationship does fear have to depression? What relationship does fear have to faith? Then what relationship does faith have to depression?

4- Why do you think the angel appeared to Elijah? What was he trying to do? Isn't it great to have a God who cares?

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