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# **The Legend Lives On**

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**Series: Living Legends - Part 3**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# The Legend Lives On

Thousands of years have come and gone, but the legend lives on. The man, his miracles, and his memories are engraved in the hearts of millions who have searched the Scriptures looking for the lives God uses to teach life's lessons. And so the legend lives on: The legend of a man named Elijah.

We know not from whence he came, but from out of nowhere there appeared this man who appeared to be more than a man, to challenge the political and religious status quo of an entire continent. And challenge he did. He faced perhaps the most dangerous king in the then-known world, and sentenced an entire nation to three and a half years without a trace of water. Then he vanished from sight, to be tested by God, and rested by God for the spiritual "high noon" of his career.

Atop a mountain, this mountain of a man climbed, and facing the entirety of the satanic priesthood, he dared them to a face-to-face confrontation with the Living God. They took the bait; God took the prize; and a whole nation was left bowing in the dust crying, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God." Then, in a matter of minutes, the whole host of demonic priests was slain by his hand at the order of God.

From there he returned to that mountain, alone, to pray for the rains to return. And return they did. But it was at that time in our hero's story that his spiritual life caved in; and Elijah, now an exhausted preacher, ran for the hills, just because a wicked queen had dared to threaten his life. There was no logic to his response any more than there is logic to ours, when we are alone and weary. But nevertheless, he ran. And ran. And ran. Until, alone and depressed, under a juniper tree, our man Elijah was found by God, weeping, weary, and worried, asking God to let him die.

That's where we were at the outset of our last lesson. There we saw Elijah trudge toward the Mountain of God to justify his weariness and confess his exclusiveness in God's Kingdom. God

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simply asked him a necessary question. He said, “What are you doing here, Elijah? Why are you here, hiding in a cave, when you are just the other side of the greatest victory in your life?” Elijah had no answer. So God chose to reveal Himself one more time to His chosen prophet. A mighty wind passed by, but God did not speak through the wind. The wind was followed by an earthquake, but God did not speak through the earthquake. The earthquake was followed by a blazing fire, but God did not speak through the fire.

Ah, but after the fire, a still, small voice...like the rippling of a gentle breeze...and it was the voice of God. It was God, once more, lovingly asking His man, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah’s answer was but to replay his self-justifying speech, and God’s response was to give him his final instructions...a roadmap to finish the course and appoint a successor to see that the work went on. Elijah had told God he was the only one left. God responded, “There are yet 7,000 besides yourself, Elijah, whose knees have not bowed to Baal.” So God assigns His man the responsibility of appointing Hazael king of Syria, of appointing Jehu as king of Israel, and of appointing a young man named Elisha to take his place as the prophet of God. Elijah proceeds, as he always has, to obey.

Our title and our outline for this lesson, found in I Kings 21 and II Kings 1 and 2, are as follows: The Legend Lives On,

I- No One Like Ahab (I Kings 21: 17-29)

II- If I Am a Man of God (II Kings 1: 1-18)

III- Way to Go, Elijah (II Kings 2: 1-14)

IV- A Man Like Us (James 5: 17-20)

### I- NO ONE LIKE AHAB

There are really three more major events in the life of Elijah worth looking at. Because of time, however, we will only glance at the first, take a bit of a look at the second, and try to spend some time on the third, before we close the book that takes a look at this miracle man of God.

Incident #1 is another encounter between Elijah and Ahab. It takes place because the self-centered king, in his incredible greed, wants his neighbor, Naboth, to give up his vineyard so he can expand his vegetable garden. It could be likened to the mayor of the city annexing his neighbor’s yard, so he could grow more

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tomatoes. At any rate, Naboth refused, and our ridiculous ruler went home, put his face to the wall and pouted, refusing to eat his “din-din”.

This, of course, infuriated his wild-eyed spouse, Jezzie, who in turn told Papa King to just leave the matter to momma. She said she would handle it, and he would get his veggie garden. She did, and he did. She arranged for Naboth to be tried and killed, and then told her hapless hubby to go down and claim the land, ‘cause the original owner had experienced a sudden case of heart failure.

Ahab quit sucking his thumb, thanked momma for doing his dirty work, and went down to the city hall to transfer the property into more capable hands, namely his own. But lo and behold, as he was standing at the counter waiting for the clerk to stamp the title deed “transferred”, he heard a familiar voice behind him. Uh-oh! Guess who? It sounded strangely like the voice which had rebuked him before, and turned the spigot off in the heavens; it sounded just like the voice that had cried out to Jehovah atop Mount Carmel and caused the local fire department to collapse in fear. It sounded like...it was—the voice of Elijah! The story takes up in verse 20 of chapter 21 of I Kings:

And Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?”

And he answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD.

Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel;

And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam... because you have made Israel to sin.”

Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him.  
(I Kings 21:20-22,25 NASB)

No one like Ahab. What a tribute. Here was a man, God said had no equal. Here was one who sold himself down the river just because he couldn’t stand up to his heathen wife. There was no one like Ahab.

But look at the mercy of God.

And it came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.

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Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

“Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring evil upon his house in his son’s days.”  
(I Kings 21:27-29 NASB)

What a God we have! Here was a man responsible for the demise of a nation, spiritually, because his wicked wife had a stranglehold on his spirit. Yet, when confronted one last time by God’s spokesman, his heart finally broke; and a God who sees all hearts postponed the judgment He had pronounced, and gave him a stay of execution. Two things stand out from this passage:

1- God knows our hearts. So many men in Scripture have feigned repentance, yet still suffered immediate consequences because an omniscient God knew they didn’t mean it. God looks on the heart. And saying the right words at the right time doesn’t stay the hand of God. All the tears and all the pious platitudes that can escape our lips do not impress God. Yet, when He finally gets through to us and exposes us for who we are, and our hearts literally explode with grief over our sin, *God’s heart actually breaks with ours*. Yes, the law of sowing and reaping goes on. But, oh, how often God relents and chooses to use us again, because we have *truly repented*, and we have a God *who knows the difference*.

2- We have a God who knows how to forgive. I don’t care what you may have done, or how deeply you have grieved God’s Spirit. There is hope. God does punish. But, Beloved, His goal is restoration. His goal is to bring you back to that place of fellowship with Him that once stirred your heart and controlled your life. So that, even *as He punishes*, His precious mercy and His priceless love make it bearable and make you usable. Wherever you are in your life today, remember, *God knows your heart, and God knows how to forgive*. Ahab is our constant reminder of those two Biblical absolutes.

### II- IF I AM A MAN OF GOD

The second incident in Elijah’s final years takes place in II Kings, chapter one. It is a good indicator that God’s man has regained his sense of confidence in what his God can do. The story unfolds like this: Ahab is now dead, and Ahaziah, the new king, has suffered from what we might call a “household accident”. It

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seems he fell off of his own front porch and is now in intensive care. He calls in his aides and sends them to the heathen god, Baalzebub, at the satanic temple at Ekron, to ask this god if he's going to come out of this thing alive. But an angel of the Lord tells Elijah about it, and tells Elijah to intercept the king's messengers on their way to Ekron, and ask this question: "Is it true that there is no God in Israel?" Then he was to send a message back to the king that says, "Since you have sought your counsel from heathen gods, the Living God must sentence you to death. You will never get out of bed again."

The messengers returned with Elijah's message. The king asked what the guy looked like who gave this gloomy prophecy, and was told he was a hairy guy with a big, wide leather belt on. The king knew immediately. "It is Elijah, the Tishbite." So the king sent a battalion of fifty men with their captain to arrest Elijah. Listen, now, to what happens.

Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'"

And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. (II Kings 1:9,10 NASB)

Elijah hadn't forgotten the fire routine. Armed with a word from God, he stood eye to eye once again with the enemy and invoked the power of his God. Ahaziah sent another captain with fifty fresh troops. (Some guys never learn.) In verse 11, they make the same mistake. They threaten the prophet, and he responds, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." And sure enough, "el zappo" number two descended from the sky, and the king's troops diminished by the count of 51 more. So the king sent a third set of troops, but the commander of this group was a little more on the ball. He appealed to Elijah not to give him the thunderbolt treatment. Elijah consented and went back to the king and personally gave him his death sentence. And verse 17 adds,

So Ahaziah [the king] died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. (II Kings 1:17a NASB)

So God's man ends his ministry with an episode characteristic of the spectacular kinds of things he did throughout his life. Two

things clamor for our attention from this closing incident.

1- Elijah was once again being used of God. Apparently his despondency at some point had given way to faith again, and Jehovah had immediately placed the mantle of power back on his shoulders. No doubt Ahaziah was fooled. Perhaps he'd read in one of the local scandal sheets that the prophet had cut and run under pressure once before, so he thought if one angry woman could send him scurrying, fifty armed soldiers ought to do the trick. But that wasn't the Elijah who had stood atop Mount Carmel and faced the entirety of Satan's vicious priests, armed with naught but the power of his God. The Elijah of old returned to close the story of his life, and Satan was reminded of a lesson he never seems to learn: *God isn't finished until He's finished.* Not in your life; not in mine. The defeats Satan thinks are terminal are often but the stepping stones to humility that God uses to make us what we need to be.

2- Those who seek counsel from satanic sources must face the wrath of God. Ahaziah's sin in this case was consulting the wizards of witchcraft for information about the future, rather than resting in the arms of a sovereign God. Those who dabble in horoscopes, toy around with Ouija boards, or like to read the likes of Jeanne Dixon, beware. God doesn't take it lightly when his children seek wisdom from satanic sources. Don't even joke about it. It's not a joking matter to God. And nothing in Scripture so consistently yields severe consequences as toying with the occult.

### III- WAY TO GO, ELLJAH

So now we come to the end of Elijah's story. He has lived, to put it mildly, one of the most exciting lives ever recorded; but the best is yet to come, for chapter two of II Kings opens with these immortal words:

And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will

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take away your master from over you today?” And he said,  
“Yes, I know; be still.” (II Kings 2:1-3 NASB)

Something was about to happen that had only happened once in recorded history. God was about to translate someone from earth to heaven without their ever tasting death. There would be no funeral, because no one would have died. There would be no burial, because there would be no body to bury. There would be no mourning, because no one would have passed into that seemingly-unknown chasm called death. The Living God simply would have personally called for His man and swept him into the heavens, body and all.

It was not a secret. Everybody seemed to know in advance. Elijah knew it. Elisha knew it. The sons of the prophets at Bethel knew it; and the sons of the prophets at Jericho knew it, as well. For as they passed through Jericho, the same scenario took place. Then, on leaving Jericho, Elijah asked Elisha to remain again; but again Elisha repeated his response: “I will not leave you.” And so Elijah moved on towards the Jordan River, Elisha at his side. We'll take up reading again at that point.

Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan.

And Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

Now it came about when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”

And he said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.”

Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

And Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. (II Kings 2:7-12 NASB)

Way to go, Elijah. *That's the way to go.* Walking along, talking



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to your best friend, or in this case, your disciple, as fifty of God's prophets look on from across the river, suddenly a chariot of fire engulfs you, and a mighty wind sweeps across the countryside, sweeping you off of your feet and into the waiting arms of your God. Earth to heaven, bypassing the grave. What a way to go!

It would have been interesting indeed to have been a hidden guest walking beside these two great men of God during those last hours together. What did they speak about? We do not know. But what a privilege for Elisha both to partake of Elijah's wisdom, and to witness Elijah's translation. And what a request to make of one of the most effectively used men ever to carry the banner of God. He asked for a double portion of his spirit.

Elijah responded, "If you see me go, it shall be so." And see it he did. One moment they were simply walking along, talking. The next minute, they were separated by the distance between heaven and earth in body, but not in spirit. For the depth of Elijah's knowledge of his God was instantly transplanted into the heart of this man Elisha and multiplied as it was.

What an exciting portrait God was painting on the parchment of His Holy Word about a day yet to come, when literally thousands of believers, like Elijah, will be snatched up into the heavenlies, without so much as tasting death. Paul wrote about it so beautifully in I Thessalonians 4 where we read:

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

(I Thessalonians 4:16-18)

Comfort one another, indeed. There will be a whole generation of Elijahs at the Day the Lord calls us home. A whole generation of men and women whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, who have not yet tasted death, whose loved ones have not stood at their graveside, weeping. There will be upon this earth of every kindred tribe and tongue, men and women who, one moment will be walking along, living life in a natural way, when suddenly the heavens will ring forth with the thunder of the voice of God; the skies will echo with the rich cries of the

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trumpet of God, and suddenly unseen by human eyes, those who have died in Christ will be transported to the heavenlies. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, those who have not yet died, but who are in Christ, will be translated...swept up in one great, awesome motion into the waiting arms of Jesus, there to live forever.

Paul says, "Comfort one another with these words." I should say so. But how seldom these days is the rapture of the church at the forefront of what we see and hear. Beloved, *this could be the generation*. You and I could be part of the band of Elijahs who remain until the calling of the Lord. And we have the reality of Elijah's experience to encourage us as we wait. Not everyone was taken that way. And certainly only a few of the millions of saints who have walked this earth will be alive on that Day. But just as it is appointed unto man once to die; it is appointed unto some *not to die* but to be taken as Elijah was, from earth to heaven, bypassing death.

Doesn't that thought send chills down your spine? Don't you fall to your knees in utter humility at the very prospect of a generation of people who will never taste of death? Doesn't it make you want to waken each morning, praising God, and asking, "Lord, could this be the day?"

Elijah lives. He lives in heaven, having not yet tasted of the cup of death. And Elijah lives on in other ways, as well. For here was a man, James tells us, who was just like us. He had the same sinful nature, the same bent to discouragement, the same tendency towards self-pity as some of us. He captured the heights; he wallowed in the depths. He experienced God's best; he also missed some of God's best because he lost his perspective and lost his joy.

So, as much as any other legend in Scripture, Elijah, a man like us, teaches us about ourselves. And not everything we see is pleasant. But what we do see is a God whose ways are so much higher than ours, that we simply must not try to minimize the manner in which He will use anything He chooses to accomplish His purposes.

Some He will take by drying brooks; He will allow them to seemingly suffer alone in life's desert places, with naught but Himself to comfort them. Some He will take to upper rooms where, perhaps unappreciated, they will minister to one, or to two, with not even those about them realizing the magnitude of the Grace

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of their God. Some, perhaps, will be groomed for one moment of greatness when facing the enemy of God in a time of intense spiritual struggle, they will use the inner strength achieved in those times alone to stand alone and let God be Himself. Some will be called to a ministry of prayer, to live in the shadows, unknown by the multitudes, but known by God as Elijah was. He was a man like us, but he knew how to pray.

So when God begins to take you where you are not sure you want to go, and your heart begins to resist His calling, think of Elijah. When God calls you to some thankless task, where your labors miss the acclaim of men, think of Elijah. When God calls you to some magnificent cause for which you think yourself unequipped, think of Elijah. When you sit, depressed, under life's juniper trees mocking God by justifying yourself, think of Elijah.

Think of Elijah. And as his life, superimposed upon yours, begins to call you to a higher level of obedience, quietly stop and thank your God for His picture book of reality, because as He speaks to you through Elijah's life, the legend lives on. And if the result is a greater level of obedience, then the legend lives on, indeed.

### THE LEGEND LIVES ON

The legend lives on, as a loving God  
Paints on the canvas of time  
Living pictures of actual lives  
Much like yours and mine.

He lets us see, through the lens of the Word,  
As His legends travel life's sod,  
What it's like to place your life  
In the hands of the Living God.

But one thing is clear, and it is this:  
When the dust is settled and gone  
If what we have learned transforms our lives  
...then the legend lives on.

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For Application and Further Study

1- Reread the entire story of the life of Elijah this week. Try to relate each major incident in his walk with God to your own personal pilgrimage:

- the drying brook
- the widow's son
- the Mount Carmel experience
- the prayer for rain
- the juniper tree
- the still small voice
- the fifty men and the fire
- the end of his life

2- Make a list of the key character qualities, both strengths and weaknesses, that you saw surface in this man's life. How can recognizing those qualities help you in your own walk?

3- Ask God to give you a heart like Elijah's heart; will yourself to go where He asks you to, ready to stand as needed.

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