

# JOB AND ELIJAH: TESTS OF THEIR FAITH

The faith of Job and of Elijah was tested — in different ways and both learned of God. Their lessons were very much different, but shared a common foundation, which can be of help to us in our life.

In a sense, Job and Elijah were at opposite ends: Job was afflicted by pride for his extraordinary faithfulness to God. Elijah was afflicted by fear that God would not deem him worthy of protection and therefore would abandon him to be assassinated.

Job's life had been a paradigm of devotion to God, as the Lord Himself explained:

**Job 2:3** *The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."* [NRSV]

After God gave permission, Satan took everything from Job: all belongings, all family and all health, except his life.

Yet Job never faltered in his belief in the sovereignty of God — even when

**Job 2:9** ..... *said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.* [KJV]

Job did maintain his integrity:

**Job 13:15a** *Even if God kills me, I have hope in him;* [EXB]

Job's reliance on his own integrity was, in fact, so steadfast that he thus completed the sentence:

**Job 13:15b** *I will still defend my ways to his face.* [EXB]

This then culminated in Job's request that God justify His actions and answer Job's arguments.

**Job 23:3-5b** *I wish I knew where to find him. I wish I knew how to go to where he lives. <sup>4</sup>I would present my case to him. I would make my arguments to show that I am innocent. <sup>5b</sup>He could give his response, and I would understand.* [ERV]

Job did lose everything, but he believed firmly that he still retained a right before God — perhaps a legal right: the right to know why God did what He did.

Self-righteousness was the last thing, which was to be stripped away from Job.

Elijah did not lose anything nor was he afflicted. In fact, Elijah had won an extraordinary victory against the prophets of Baal, after he challenged them publicly by declaring to the people of Israel:

**1 Kings 18:23-24** *Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. <sup>24</sup>Then call on the name of your*

*god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed.* [NLT]

Later, he mocked the false prophets publicly for their god not answering their earnest pleas.

**1 Kings 18:27** *About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!"* [NLT]

Finally, he demonstrated his being a prophet of the true Lord by praying and

**1 Kings 18:38-39** *Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! <sup>39</sup>And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!"* [NLT]

Elijah concluded the day by slaughtering all the 450 false prophets.

**1 Kings 18:40** *Then Elijah commanded, "Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one escape!" So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.* [NLT]

However, the very next day, Elijah became suicidal, because of queen Jezebel's threat to have him killed, as the prophets of Baal had been killed.

**1 Kings 19:4** *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 away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.* [KJV]

Elijah's temptation and test of faith was a case of fear that God would abandon and not save him from a potential deadly event, because of the murderous fury of the powerful, evil queen. Asking to die and be thus finished was a demonstration of unbelief in God and of lack of faith. Until He calls us, the Lord has work for us to do, here on this earth.

God did not answer Elijah's prayer and He does not answer similar ones from us: Elijah's faith failed, but the Lord's mercy did not and He did not abandon Elijah in his faltering faith, but He rescued him by:

**1]** Sending a comforting angel to provide nourishment for the body that Elijah, in his despondency, had neglected and not just a perfunctory snack, but two hearty meals;

**2]** Giving him a quick assignment to travel to Mount Sinai to hear about the ministry expected of him;

**3]** Not commiserating him: "Poor Elijah; I am so sorry about how you feel; don't worry, everything

will be alright." Rather: "You have to eat to survive and here I am providing the food, because you have important work to do."

As a result, although the threat had not subsided and Elijah was therefore temporarily left in his predicament, he no longer was despairing and wishing to die; rather he was desirous to obey by going back into the dangerous territory where Jezebel reigned.

God never explained what He Himself was going to do: not even about the threat to Elijah's life. Only the assignment to Elijah was declared at Mount Sinai:

**1 Kings 19:15–16** *The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; <sup>16</sup>and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. [NASB]*

Thus energized, Elijah returned to the land of Jezebel and obeyed the Lord's commands.<sup>†</sup>

The lesson for Elijah was to take his eyes off from himself and focus on the ministry the Lord had for him — a powerful ministry: the anointing of two kings and a prophet, his successor.

In the case of Job, God did not send a comforting angel, rather He upbraided Job sternly:

**Job 38:1–4** *Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: <sup>2</sup>"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup>Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. <sup>4</sup>Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." [NRSV]*

Until then, Job had been convinced he had some legal rights with God: the right to an explanation of what God does.

His lesson was: before God, we have no rights at all; we are not operating at the same level; He is the Almighty creator, the One who is in control of everything and always does what He wants. However, He is also the One who loves us and provides according to His mercies and His love, not according to our wisdom or our preferences.

As soon as Job learned the lesson and repented of his arrogance, God showered him with all blessings and restored twice as much as he had lost.

**Job 42:1, 3, 5–6, 10** *Then Job answered the Lord and said: "..... <sup>3</sup>You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. .... <sup>5</sup>"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. <sup>6</sup>Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes." ..... <sup>10</sup>And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. [NKJV]*

Elijah did not have pride and arrogance (notwithstanding his incredible deeds against the false prophets). He simply felt that God had forgotten him. He did not need a rebuke; he needed encouragement. That God did by sending the angel.

Sometimes my own faith may be tempted — perhaps in a lesser way — as the faith of Job: I want to know "why God." Why God has permitted this to happen, why God has not answered my prayer, why God did not speak to so and so. The lesson from Job's life is: repent, I do not know what I am saying and, in any case, I am saying and complaining too much. I am to repent and the Lord will restore and more all that I have lost.

Some other times I may have received a threat and be afraid of what might happen: illness (mine or of someone close to me); accusations by enemies; financial distress; threats from authorities.

The lesson from Elijah's life is to concentrate on doing the Lord's will, as it is revealed to me — as I go along — by an angel or by circumstances or by what the Lord has already tasked me to do.

Job died to self by renouncing his perceived rights before the majesty of God; Elijah died to self by forgetting about his own affairs and circumstances and concentrating on doing the will of God.

In each case, God showed His mercy and love by ministering to Job and to Elijah, as each one needed.

The common foundation of the two lessons was declared very succinctly by John, the Baptist, to his disciples — and to all of us — shortly after the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry:

**John 3:30** *He must increase, but I must decrease. [KJV]*

Decrease before the Lord Jesus must we all — for His glory and for our own good.

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<sup>†</sup> Elijah was later taken to heaven by a chariot of fire (**2 Kings 2:1–11**); shortly afterwards, Jezebel was thrown out of a window, Jehu's horses trampled her body and dogs maimed her corpse, as prophesized (**2 Kings 9:30–37**).