

# "In the Strength of the Food"

1 Kings 18 & 19

August 13, 2006

I have to tell you - I think that Elijah is one of the most fascinating people in all of scripture. This guy is marvelous - beyond belief at many points. And yet, even with all of his seemingly superhuman qualities - even with all of the miraculous events attributed to him, he is so very human. So human that I find myself identifying with him. Sometimes, I want to just get upset with Elijah for being so dumb - but then I realize that I have often been just as dumb.

Imagine the whole story - you have probably heard the whole story before but I will review it briefly because I don't think that you can really hear what has happened in our first scripture reading apart from the 'rest of the story'. Before Elijah's long run that we just read about, an incredible miracle has just happened. Elijah has been standing toe to toe with the religious leaders - the priest of another religion that worship something name Baal. He told them that their god [Baal] was not real and Elijah said that he could prove it. He set up a little "call the fire down from heaven contest". Both the priest of Baal and Elijah made an animal sacrifice and placed it on an altar. You remember the story so I suppose I should not take all of you time telling the whole story of how the Baal priests danced and prayed and implored their god to send down fire and nothing happened no matter how hard they tried. And I will not belabor the point of Elijah pouring oceans of water over his sacrifice and then with a simple little please directed in God's direction, fire came down and consumed the offering and the altar too. *{{ The Sunday school teacher was carefully explaining the story of Elijah the Prophet and the false prophets of Baal. She explained how Elijah built the altar, put wood upon it, cut the steer in pieces, and laid it upon the altar. And then, Elijah commanded the people of God to fill four barrels of water and pour it over the altar. He had them do this four times. "Now," said the teacher, "can anyone in the class tell me why the Lord would have Elijah pour water over the steer on the altar?" A little girl in the back of the room started waving her hand, "I know! I know!" she said, "To make the gravy!" }}*

Pretty amazing stuff - the power and reality of our God. I don't really want to get into the moral right of wrong of having all of the priest of Baal killed. It is messy and a part of the Bible that I can not understand. What I can understand is that such a thing would certainly make the queen [big supporter of Baal and the priests of Baal] angry. I can understand why an angry queen would make someone like Elijah more than a little nervous. But I also find myself wondering what is wrong with this guy - doesn't he understand that the same almighty God that just burned up a stone altar was with him. How can he forget the power of God so quickly? Yet

**he falls into a deep depression. And he ran for his life. And he just wanted to die! All he could see was the he was worthless. All he wanted was to sit and sulk.**

**Have you ever been there. Have you ever gotten so tired that depression took over and you just did not think you wanted any of it any more. You didn't want the struggle - you didn't want the anger and expectations of people - you weren't doing any good anyway. And you just wanted to find an old broom tree out in the wilderness and sit down and never get up. How could you ever find the strength to go on - why would God even want you?**

**As I was pondering life and good ol' Elijah I read an article that said: There are many reasons why God would not want you *{real encouraging opening}*. But don't worry. You're in good company. *{then it has this list}* - Moses stuttered. - Hosea's wife was a prostitute. - Amos' only training was in the school of fig-tree pruning. - Jacob was a liar. - David had an affair. - Solomon was too rich. - Abraham was too old. - David was too young. - Timothy had ulcers. - Peter was afraid of death. - Lazarus was dead. - John was self-righteous. - Paul was a murderer. So was Moses. - Jonah ran from God. - Miriam was a gossip. - Gideon and Thomas both doubted. - Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal. - Elijah was burned out. - John the Baptist was a loudmouth. - Martha was a worry-wart. - Mary was lazy. - Samson had long hair. - Noah got drunk. - Did I mention that Moses had a short fuse? - So did Peter, Paul - well, lots of folks did.**

But God doesn't require a job interview. He doesn't hire and fire like most bosses, because He's more our Dad than our Boss. He's not prejudiced or partial, not judging, grudging, sassy, or brassy, not deaf to our cry, not blind to our need. As much as we try, God's gifts are free. Satan says, "You're not worthy." Jesus says, "So what? I AM." Satan looks back and sees our mistakes. God looks back and sees the cross.

**God looks back and sees the cross. God is a God of both incredible power and an even more incredible love. How quickly Elijah forgot - how quickly we forget. We get so paralyzed by our fears and disappointments - God knows those things will be a part of our world and of our lives. So He comes to feed and strengthen us.**

**I empathize with Elijah. I have never had the queen and all of the people of the nation angry with me. But I have forgotten the power and call of God. I have struggled with fears and disappointments and angry folk so that I have wanted to just curl up somewhere and hid. As I read about Elijah struggling with his fears, not wanting or having the strength to move I encounter what is, to me, the most amazing part of this whole story. God sends His messenger with bread to feed Elijah. He takes the bread and eats but it does not seem to have any effect. But God does not give up. He sends the messenger again. Again Elijah eats and is strengthened - this time it takes. This time Elijah is pulled out of his depression enough that he is able to run for 40 days [which, in the language of scripture, means 'as long as he needed to run']. Now that is some goooooood bread! - - - - Having**

**stepped away from his fear - having been strengthened to move out of his depression, Elijah finally comes to a place where he is able to hear God speak again [even if it was only in a quiet whisper].**

**I suppose that in those times when I have been where Elijah was - in those times of fear and depression, I would hardly be ready to have someone tell me that God is able to refresh, renew, strengthen and guide me. So I suspect that if you are in such a place in your life, you may not want to believe me if I tell you that God has bread for your journey ..... it is true, though. Elijah ran for 40 days in the strength of that food and I have feed on it and found strenght and hope.**

**Jesus said, "I am the Bread of life!" - - - It is a bread that is given for the life of the world ..... in it is strength for today and life eternal. Jesus said: "I am the bread that has come down from heaven - the bread of life!"**

**AMEN**