

# Gospel Doctrine Lesson 28 – “After the Fire a Still Small Voice” (1 Kings 17-19)

**Lesson Goal:** To encourage us to put God first in our lives and to find guidance and comfort in the words of the living prophet and the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.

**Essential Question:** **WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO FOR ETERNAL LIFE?**

**Why are we unwilling to make great sacrifices for the kingdom of God when we're willing to in other areas of our lives? Are we willing to sacrifice the natural man, give up our carnal desires, and turn to the Lord? Why is it so difficult for us to look inside ourselves for the causes of our problems?**

## 1. Elijah seals up the heavens, is miraculously sustained, and raises a widow's son from the dead – (1 Kings 17)

**President Gordon B. Hinckley:** "I draw strength from a simple statement made concerning the Prophet Elijah, who warned King Ahab of drought and famine to come upon the land. And Ahab scoffed. And the Lord told Elijah to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith, that there he should drink of the brook, and he would be fed by the ravens. And the scripture records a simple and powerful statement: **'So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord.'**

**"There was no arguing. There was no excusing. There was no equivocating.** Elijah 'went and did according unto the word of the Lord.' And he was saved from the terrible calamities that befell those who scoffed and argued and questioned" (*Ensign*, Dec. 1971, 123-124).

Elijah required the widow to give her last morsel of food to him rather than to her own starving son because **this kind of sacrifice is ultimately required of everyone who would come unto Christ to be perfected in Him.** This willingness to sacrifice all that we have is required of all who would receive the fullness of Christ.

**Elder Jeffery R. Holland:** "The widow's response when Elijah asked her for food was an expression of faith--as great, under these circumstances, as any I know in the scriptures.... Perhaps uncertain what the cost of her faith would be..., she first took her small loaf to Elijah, obviously trusting that if there were not enough bread left over, at least she and her son would have died in an act of pure charity" (*Ensign*, May 1996, 29).

**President Ezra Taft Benson:** "When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities....May God bless us to put [Him] first and, as a result, reap peace in this life and eternal life with a fullness of joy in the life to come" (*Ensign*, May 1988, 4,6).

**We must learn a lesson from the Lord's care for Elijah.**

**A. The ravens were ready.**

**Jeffrey R. Holland:** "Ravens did bring Elijah bread and meat to eat, but unless ravens carry more than I think they do, this was not a gourmet meal" (*Ensign*, May 1996, 29).

**B. A widow was willing.**

**GOD CAN HELP US MEET OUR NEEDS IF WE ARE DILIGENT IN HIS SERVICE.  
EVEN IF WE HAVE SO LITTLE TO GIVE, IF WE GIVE ALL WE HAVE, IT WILL ALWAYS BE ENOUGH.**

## 2. Elijah challenges the priests of Baal and opens the heavens for rain – (1 Kings 18)

**1 Kings 18:21:** And Elijah came unto all the people, and said,

**How long halt ye between two opinions?**

**Every day we are faced with choices—will we obey the Lord or not?**

- Will we cheat, lie, steal, look at forbidden images?
- Will we pray and study His word as He has commanded us to do?
- Will we follow the “gods” of the world and forget the God we owe everything to?
- Will we “disagree” with the prophet of the Lord in our vanity, believing we know better?
- Will we drop a criticism here and there?
- Will we postpone paying our tithing?
- Will we neglect our church callings?
- Will we skip Family Home Evening?

**Elder Neal A. Maxwell:** "The stirring words of various prophets...urge us to choose, to decide, and not to halt.... Elijah's message has tremendous relevancy today, for all must finally choose between the gods of this world and the God of eternity" (*That My Family Should Partake*, 22).

**President Ezra Taft Benson:** "Decisions should be timely. Sometimes a lack of decision on a point is actually a decision in the opposite direction. We need to make up our minds" (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 386).

**Sterling W. Sill:** "Some sins are committed because we do wrong; other sins are committed because we do nothing. Some people just don't make up their minds one way or the other. In consequence, they develop a kind of permanently "suspended judgment." Ancient Israel had this problem. Elijah said to them, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kgs. 18:21). In other words, **Elijah said, make up your minds.** But the record says, "And the people answered him not a word."

"That is the pattern of most indecision. We just don't move, one way or the other. **Our minds are left dangling between choices.** We are like the patient who was asked by the psychiatrist whether or not he ever had any trouble in making up his mind, and the patient said, "Well, yes and no." There are far too many yes-and-no people, including Church members. **We all have good intentions, but too many of us fail to put them in force**" (*New Era*, Aug. 1979, 6).

### 3. **Elijah is comforted by the Holy Ghost and instructed to continue in God's work – (1 Kings 19)**

This was Elijah's deepest moment of sorrow. **He had done his best, performed miracles, opened the heavens and still Israel remained faithless.** In despondency, ". . . 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" (1 Kings 19:4).

**DESPAIR, in Elijah's life and in our lives, SEEMS INESCAPABLE.**  
(Elijah retreated to the mountain; we can retreat to the temple.)

**Breck England:** "How often have we felt this way? Perhaps our Church calling isn't going well. Maybe we do our best to teach a youth class and they don't seem responsive. Maybe we home- or visit-teach someone who wishes we would go away. Maybe we're on a mission and no one will listen, no one will even open the door. Maybe we have a wayward child or a spouse who doesn't seem to care. **Despair seems inescapable**" (*Meridian Magazine*, July 1, 2014).

**Elder Robert L. Simpson:** "One of the most neglected and yet most needed laws for this troubled generation in a modern world of acceleration and distraction is the law of the fast. Fasting and praying have been referred to almost as a singular function from the earliest times. Adam's generation fasted and prayed, as did Moses on Sinai. (Deut. 9:9-11.) **The Prophet Elijah traveled to Mt. Horeb under the influence of fasting and prayer.** There he received the word of the Lord. His preparation had not been in vain. (1 Kings 19:8.) This was the true fast, abstinence from both food and drink. This is still the manner of the true fast in our day" (*CR*, Oct 1967, 16-17).

**Boyd K. Packer:** "The Spirit does not get our attention **by shouting or shaking us** with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all" ("The Candle of the Lord," *Ensign*, Jan. 1983)

**President Gordon B. Hinckley:** (when a news reporter asked how he communicates with God) The prophet's response was, "I think the best way I could describe the process is to liken it to the experience of Elijah as set forth in the book of First Kings. Elijah spoke to the Lord, and there was a wind, a great wind, and the Lord was not in the wind. And there was an earthquake, and the Lord was not in the earthquake. And there was a fire, and the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still, small voice, which I describe as **the whisperings of the Spirit.**" (*Ensign*, Nov 1996, 51).

**President Ezra Taft Benson:** "Do you take time to listen to the promptings of the Spirit? Answers to prayer come most often by a still voice and are discerned by our deepest, innermost feelings. I tell you that you can know the will of God concerning yourselves **if you will take the time to pray and to listen**" (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 428).

**President Boyd K. Packer (on the still small voice and of our need to learn to hear it):** "Many years ago John Burroughs, a naturalist, one summer evening was walking through a crowded park. Above the sounds of city life he heard the song of a bird. He stopped and listened! **Those with him had not heard it. He looked around. No one else had noticed it. It bothered him that everyone should miss something so beautiful.** He took a coin from his pocket and flipped it into the air. It struck the pavement with a ring, no louder than the song of the bird. Everyone turned; they could hear that.

**Answers to prayer come in a quiet way.** The scriptures describe that voice of inspiration as a still, small voice. If you really try, **you can learn to respond to that voice**" (Boyd K. Packer, "Prayers and Answers," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 19,20).

**Henry B. Eyring:** "Now, I testify it is a small voice. It whispers, not shouts. And so you must be very quiet inside. That is why you may wisely fast when you want to listen. And that is why **you will listen best when you feel, "Father, thy will, not mine, be done."** You will have a feeling of "I want what you want." Then, the still small voice will seem as if it pierces you. It may make your bones to quake. More often it will make your heart burn within you, again softly, but with a burning which will lift and reassure" ("To Draw Closer to God," *Ensign*, May 1991, 67).

**Elder Neal A. Maxwell:** "When we are down and discouraged, the hope of Christ can lift us up lest we remain vulnerable overlong. The brisk pace of Church service also helps us focus talent and time outwardly rather than being left alone for long with our moods. **Duties knocking at one's door are like friends come to call, not always convenient but usually gladdening in their effect**" (*Notwithstanding My Weakness*, 49).

### Three keys to help us come unto Christ as Elijah did:

- **By exercising simple faith**
- **By decisively choosing to obey and follow the commandments of the Lord**
- **By learning to listen to the "still small voice" of the Spirit**

**Then, CLARITY COMES. A SENSE OF DIRECTION COMES. WE KNOW THE RIGHT PATH TO CHRIST.**

## **THE STORY OF ELIJAH'S LIFE**

### 1. Withheld the rain and the dew. (1 Kings 17:1)

The miracles that Elijah performed were in direct defiance of the worship of Baal, who was considered to be the storm god, "responsible for bringing life-giving rains at certain times of the year and thus restoring fertility to the land. After the yearly rainy season, the ground got progressively drier, and eventually all vegetation died. During this period, Baal was thought to be in the power of the god of death and sterility. In this verse Elijah announces that...Baal has nothing to do with bringing rain and fertility. **In reality the Lord controls both rain and drought, fertility and sterility, and life and death.**" (*Harper-Collins Study Bible*, p. 547)

### 2. Survived famine in hiding by being fed by ravens. (1 Kings 17:3-4)

An alternate translation for the word "brook" in this account is "wadi," a stream bed that contains water only in the rainy season. Obviously, this was not the rainy season, so even though it dried up eventually, finding water there was a miracle. Obadiah is a sub-hero in this story, as he rescued and sheltered 100 prophets from Queen Jezebel's wrath (1 Kings 18:3-4). The severity of the famine was extreme, causing King Ahab and his governor Obadiah to *personally* go out in search of pasture for their animals (1 Kings 18:3-6).

### 3. Perpetuated flour and oil for a widow's household. (1 Kings 17:10-16)

Widows had no means of financial support, so if they had no extended family to care for them, they could quickly become destitute.

### 4. Raised the dead. (1 Kings 17:17-23)

This is another dramatic show of Jehovah's power vs. the idol's power, a powerful reminder to the children of Israel throughout generations as the story would be re-told: **The Lord God could actually overrule death.**

### 5. Drew fire from heaven. (1 Kings 18:21-39)

According to the people's belief, as the storm god, Baal should have easily been able to draw fire from heaven. Indeed Andrew Clarke's Bible Commentary claims **the priests of Baal rigged their altars with fires beneath them**, working through a system of tunnels, so that the sacrifices would appear to ignite spontaneously. The duel with Elijah's God would have looked like an easy win to the priests of Baal. It must have astonished them when their elaborate system failed.

### 6. Killed 850 idolatrous priests. (1 Kings 18:40)

Who knows how Elijah actually killed the priests--likely he led the people in killing them--but he was following the Law of Moses: **the penalty for advocating worship of idols was death** (Deut. 13:1-5).

### 7. Called a rainstorm. (1 Kings 18:41-45)

Elijah placed himself in a position of ultimate worship and prayer, low to the ground, facedown. Elijah's servant was probably sitting where the Baha'i Shrine of the Bab is today on Mt. Carmel, looking out toward the sea. **If after watching that cloud swell up until the sky was roiling and black**, Elijah did actually run ahead of Ahab to Jezreel, it was better than a half-marathon: 17 miles.

### 8. Was visited and fed by an angel twice during his time of greatest despair. (1 Kings 19:1-7)

Unfortunately, **Jezebel was not humbled and converted** by the fantastic display of divine power at Mt. Carmel, but enraged. Elijah's astonishment and disappointment must have been overwhelming: After controlling the elements for three years, after raising the dead, after all the mighty priesthood power he displayed in the duel with the priests of Baal, after condemning them all to death, after calling a storm from heaven himself, **he was back in hiding again. Even a mighty prophet of God, who can control the elements, cannot control a human soul who refuses to repent.** Elijah felt such a sense of despair and uselessness that he requested of the Lord death.

### 9. One meal carried him for 40 days and 40 nights on a journey to Mt. Horeb. (1 Kings 19:8-21)

By going from Mt. Carmel to Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai) Elijah was retracing the steps of the Children of Israel and Moses backwards. It was a journey of 150 miles to an outdoor temple, **a journey to seek the comfort of God.**

**Jeffrey R. Holland:** "I know we can each do something, however small that act may seem to be. We can pay an honest tithe and give our fast and freewill offerings. ... And **we can watch for other ways to help.** To worthy causes and needy people, we can give time if we don't have money, and we can give love when our time runs out. **We can share the loaves we have and trust God that the cruse of oil will not fail**" (*Conference Report*, Apr. 1996).

### **A Personal Experience with Elijah by Toni Thomas**

**"I had had a difficult night.** My joints, afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis, were hot and swollen, and it hurt even to breathe. The acute conditions had gone on for weeks, making sleep difficult, and **on that Sunday morning I felt I could not go on, worn out from suffering.**

"Then my four-year-old son climbed in bed with me. 'Tell me a story, Mommy,' he said.

**"I thought of the prophet Elijah sitting under the juniper tree,** so I told my son his story. Elijah had called Israel and its king to repentance, but the king and his wife would not repent. Elijah called down fire from heaven that consumed the altars of the prophets of Baal. Queen Jezebel became very angry and swore to have him slain. Elijah fled alone into the wilderness and sat under a juniper tree. **Tired and discouraged, he said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life'** (1 Kgs. 19:4).

**"Those words expressed how I felt that day—**I had tried my best and had given my all; I too wanted the ordeal to be over. It is enough, I thought to myself.

**"Somehow I dressed and went to church, but sacrament meeting had scarcely begun when the pain in my hips made sitting in my wheelchair unbearable. In tears, I asked my husband to take me to the foyer.**

**"As we sat there I told him the story of Elijah sitting under the juniper tree.** I explained that after praying, Elijah fell asleep. Then an angel touched him and bade him eat the food set there for him. Elijah ate and drank, then slept again.

**"A deacon came through the door with a tray and offered us the bread of the sacrament.**

**"A few moments passed, and then I continued in a hushed voice with Elijah's story.** A second time the angel came to Elijah. 'Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee' (1 Kgs. 19:7). He did so and received strength enough to travel 40 days and 40 nights.

**"Soon the deacon returned.** As I took the cup of water from the tray, **a still, small voice spoke to my heart.** Surely the Lord knew that the journey was too great for me and that I needed strength. Like Elijah's heavenly feast, the bread and water the deacon offered would also sustain me. **My feelings of weariness and despair departed, and they have never returned. I knew I could go on, in spite of the pain, for however long was necessary.**

**"I am thankful for the Savior. Even though at times the journey may seem too long, I know that he is mindful of each of us and will give us strength to go forward"** (Toni Thomas, "Sharing Elijah's Juniper Tree," *Ensign*, Jan. 1998, 66-67).

**As we put the Lord first in our lives,  
no matter the circumstances,  
we will be blessed.**

**Joseph Smith held up Elijah as the great example of faith in the Son of God, and prayed that he himself might develop the faith of an Elijah. Let us then pray to our Father in Heaven for ourselves individually as the Prophet Joseph Smith did for himself:**

**"Look down upon thy servant Joseph, at this time; and let faith on the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to a greater degree than thy servant ever yet has enjoyed, be conferred upon him; even the faith of Elijah; and let the Lamp of eternal life, be lit up in his heart, never to be taken away; and let the words of eternal life, be poured upon the soul of thy servant; that he may know thy will, thy statutes, and thy commandments, and thy judgments to do them"** (Joseph Smith, "Reflections," August 23, 1842, as quoted in Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 536).