

Elijah's Legacy - A Twist in the Story

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Is it my imagination? I don't think so! Lately, Satan has apparently intensified his attack on God's creation. Disease and tragedy is rampant, causing great hardship and heartache for the entire human race. No family on Earth has escaped the sickening consequences of sin's raging scourge.

People's serious or sad expressions and drooping shoulders often reflect their heavy emotional load. Like a box closing in on all sides, trouble seems to be slowly squeezing life's energy out of the heartiest of souls. Three words I hear people often use as they describe how they are feeling tired, burned-out, and depressed.

To make matters even worse, Satan's assault appears especially directed at God's people. The world is indeed "waxing old" and many of God's people are crying in great anguish: "How long, oh Lord, before Your promised return?" Surely, many of you relate to what I have just described!

As Christians, we encourage each other to persevere, often citing Job as an example.

Certainly, this man was a saint! James said of Job: "**Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**" (James 5:10-11) I am also reminded of a text in Romans that says: "**And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? *If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:30-31 – italics mine)**

I realize that Job's example and this particular promise should bring God's people great comfort – but when the day to day challenges build and the going gets rough, it is sometimes hard to *conceptualize* how all this can be true for our own situation. Frequently, the struggle can become so intense that the feeble human frame trembles uncontrollably from within, filling our soul with intense anxiety. When this happens, most Christians feel guilty for even allowing these types of feelings to enter their heart.

Then, well-meaning friends (like Job's friends) may try to encourage us by quoting Peter: "**Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.**"

Unfortunately, this type of encouragement usually hits our heart like a knife and only serves to intensify feelings of guilt. No doubt, all of us will REJOICE when the struggle is over and tears are no longer shed. But until then, how do we cope?

I wish I had the solution for every person who calls the WUAS' office asking for advice – how I long to comfort each of you as you face your personal heartache and struggle. For now, our only recourse is to kneel together in prayer, claiming and clinging to our Master's promises, as we await the glorious moment when sin will be no more.

Lessons from Someone Chosen

Meanwhile, let me attempt to encourage you by directing your thoughts toward the life of one of God's chosen. Most of us are familiar with the story of Elijah and the characters involved in the events that took place at Mt. Carmel. When we think of Elijah, the man, many mental pictures come to mind when we recall the Biblical account of his work.

Let me highlight just a few. Filled with the Spirit, Elijah bravely walked into the king's palace and boldly thundered God's warning at wicked Abab and his decadent wife, Jezebel. (1 Kings 17:1) At Elijah's request, God filled the widow's son's lifeless body with breath. (1 Kings 17:19-24)

Elijah fearlessly taunted Baal's prophets and God responded with a lightening bolt of fire that licked up and evaporated every drop of water on the drenched altar. (1 Kings 18:20-38) Elijah fervently prayed seven times and God sent a deluge of rain that soaked the parched and cracked Earth, ending a three-year drought. (1 Kings 18:42-45)

Filled with God's Spirit, Elijah tucked his garment into his belt and through the pelting downpour ran faster than a galloping horse for 20 miles to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:46) The spiritual magnitude of this man was phenomenal and each description above indicates that he was fear-less! His dauntless efforts to do the Lord's will is telling evidence that he was indeed *chosen*.

Elijah – when you speak the name, the sound has a special ring to it, doesn't it? The name itself means *Yahweh is the real God*. Think of it. In Elijah's generation, every time his name was spoken, it was a testimony for the God whom he served. To be sure, God's people of subsequent generations have held Elijah's name in high esteem as it thundered down through the ages, leaving the last generation wondering and waiting in anticipation . . . anticipation of something yet to come.

In Jesus' day, the people of Israel expected Elijah to "physically reappear" because the last two verses found in the Old Testament say: "**See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.**" (Malachi 4:5,6)

Malachi wrote this statement 350 years before Messiah was born, so when John the Baptist appeared on the banks of the Jordan, people asked: "Are you Elijah?" (John 1:21-28)

People wondered if Jesus was the resurrected Elijah as well and several times, Jesus tried to elaborate on Malachi's statement, clarifying the meaning for His followers: "**The disciples asked him, 'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus**

replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist." (Matthew 17:10-13; Matthew 11:13-15)

The angel's words to Zechariah before John's birth [John the Baptist] explain the intent of Malachi's words even more: "**Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**" (Luke 1:16-17)

These references make it clear that God predicted "the spirit of Elijah" or said another way, the manner in which Elijah did his work, would reappear before the time of the end. The Holy Spirit gave this special anointing to Elijah so he could boldly carry out God's will.

Notice how this "anointing" is described in Acts and what the purpose for this special gift was: "**After they [the disciples] prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *spoke the word of God boldly.***" (Acts 4:31 – italics mine) So, please remember these texts as we continue to reflect on Elijah's life.

To be sure, we love to recall the stories about Elijah that document the high points of his life. Unfortunately, Elijah's story does not end with the Mt. Carmel experience and truthfully, for those people who are among Earth's final generation, the most compelling part of his legacy unfolds at this point in the story.

Despite Elijah's Spirit-filled anointing, he lost his nerve and momentarily allowed his humanness to overrule. If you read the account in 1 Kings 19, you will soon realize that Elijah was indeed flesh and blood. The challenges and stress of life became too much and under the barrage of Satan's attack, Elijah snapped.

Chapter 19 depicts a broken, *fear-filled* man, quickly scampering away into the wilderness to escape Jezebel's wrath. How did this happen?

The lessons we can glean from the next segment of Elijah's life are very important for God's people today and reveal valuable insight into God's character that will give us hope during the present storms of life and the impending dark days ahead.

Disappointment Sets the Stage

After his Mt. Carmel experience, Elijah's hopes were sky high. He could envision great days ahead for the nation of Israel. The events of the previous day unfolded better than he had even hoped – all that he had prayed, fasted, and dreamed about seemed to be coming true. His expectations soared and I am sure sleep eluded him. Elijah made a common, but very grave error as he contemplated what "he" would do now that Israel witnessed the power of God on Mt.

Carmel.

Confident that the people of Israel would repent, certain that Ahab and Jezebel would no longer be a problem, Elijah became "intoxicated" with the thrill of the moment. Can you blame him? How excited he must have been thinking that Israel would finally be "one nation under God." I suspect that from the moment it began to rain, Elijah thought the rest was up to him.

All the citizens of Israel had bowed to their knees giving homage to Baal (or so he thought) and now it was left to him to get the job done. Taking the mammoth-sized load upon his own shoulders, he began mentally to organize this impossible burden.

Christians often slide down this slippery slope. Our motives begin innocently enough. We want to accomplish great things for God. We attempt to rise above all opposition, no matter how bleak the situation. At times, our energy seems endless as we rally those around us to press on in Christ's strength.

Unfortunately, few of us realize that we have begun to slip and are now attempting to push ahead in our own strength. Running ahead of God, using our own feeble resources, we press on until we run out of steam and crumple in a heap. Amazed at our own weakness, we become ashamed for feeling burned out.

Although his circumstances were somewhat different, Elijah became immersed in his effort to do all that God asked and did not see the bombshell coming either. He learned too late, that alone, he was no match for the job.

Sadly, Elijah failed to realize that Ahab's and Jezebel's heart had moved beyond the point of redemption. The grip of sin had pushed them beyond the point of no return and the only response from Jezebel was a chilling threat: **"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."** (1 Kings 19:2)

Jezebel, of course, was referring to her prophets of Baal who had been put to death at Elijah's command. With an explosive slap, Jezebel's message knocked Elijah senseless. As her words continued to echo in his ears, Elijah allowed his mind to wander back to the sight of those dead bodies slaughtered in the Kishon Valley.

As one thought led to another, I believe he began to recall in vivid detail, all the previous atrocities Jezebel had committed. Before he knew what hit him, the prophet who had faced all previous obstacles with vigorous faith, slipped into the trap and collapsed under the prolonged pressure.

Loneliness and Silence

When Elijah had stayed in Zarephath, he found refuge (God ordained) with a widow and her son. (1 Kings 17:7-24) The previous months of exile by the brook called Cherith had been

lonely. Although the living conditions were sparse in Zarephath, Elijah found comfort and the warmth of human companionship as he conversed with the widow and her son.

Now, however, Elijah is alone without human fellowship – no one is near to help him sort through his thoughts and remind him of God's sustaining power. Just as surely as the brightness of day gives way to shadows of darkness, the shadows of doubt crept over Elijah's heart leaving silent blackness.

As he struggled to regain his equilibrium and longed for spiritual guidance, all Elijah heard was silence. I am reminded of Abraham's walk to Mt. Moriah. He, too, was alone with his thoughts and the silence. Each agonizing step brought Abraham closer to his objective. Could he really bring himself to sacrifice his only son as God had instructed him to do? I am also reminded of our precious Savior and His harrowing experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Although Jesus requested human companionship (Matthew 26:38), He, too, was left alone with His thoughts and the silence.

Fear Topples the Best

Fear – it usually builds slowly, beginning in the silence with a single thought, causing a small ripple of doubt. If we allow our mind to linger, just long enough to let that single thought take on substance, other ideas quickly follow in the wake. What was once a ripple, inevitably becomes a wave. Anxiety builds as the winds of "what if" stir the mental picture – for what seems like a fleeting second we allow doubt to loom on the horizon of our soul.

What was once an innocent thought, now comes crashing down over our psyche like a giant tsunami. Physiological signs surface rapidly – our heart begins to race, our palms begin to sweat and our temples begin to pound. Our thoughts now race out of control and carried along by the force of emotion.

Before we realize what has happened, our emotions have carried our thoughts far away from rational conclusions and we find ourselves cold, shivering, exhausted and alone.

Fear – one of Satan's most effective tools – gave birth in the Garden of Eden. Just as fear caused Adam and Eve to run and hide, the same emotions grabbed Elijah with a death grip that would not let him go. If Elijah had stood firm in quite trust, I believe God would have sustained him and the temptation to run would have trickled off Elijah like water on a duck's back.

If he had focused on what God had accomplished for him in the past, rather than Jezebel's murderous schemes, courage would have returned to his soul and Jezebel's threat would have seemed like idle nonsense. Trust alone will keep your ship anchored to The Rock – The Prince of Peace.

As the story progresses, we see Elijah running to Beersheba, 95 miles to the South, and technically out of Ahab and Jezebel's jurisdiction. Elijah soon learns that you cannot outrun fear. If you carry fear in your heart, you cannot run fast or far enough, for it will follow you wherever

you go.

What makes fear so deadly is its ability to paralyze the Spirit's movement within your life. Spiritually and emotionally speaking, when fear grabs you, your life comes to a screeching halt. Notice the progression in Elijah's life: A simple note from a wicked lady – a single moment that lingers too long on a fearful thought – a momentary mind-lapse causing Elijah to forget who he is, the Spirit-filled prophet of God Almighty. One cascading thought after another fear, loneliness, despair, a complete breakdown.

Jesus alluded to this situation when He said that fear and the Spirit cannot dwell together.

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love [the result of the Spirit living within our heart] drives out fear . . ." (1 John 4)

God's Thoughts Higher Than Man's

Elijah knew depression that was so deep, dark and sinister that to eat seemed absurd. He longed for sleep, a sleep so deep that he would not have to wake up and face tomorrow's problems. Only people who have walked this path can know the depths of how far you can plunge – off the pedestal and into the pit – a depression so deep, who wants to live?

For those who have wrestled the giant of depression, Elijah's attitude seems all too familiar. **Let me interject a very poignant point – God understands!** Notice how tenderly God deals with Elijah's broken spirit. First, He sends an angel to feed him, twice to be exact. (Again, consider the parallel as Jesus struggles in His final moments before the cross.) I believe this practical act was a token of tenderness – an intimate moment between God and His servant.

Notice that the angel appeared to Elijah when his hope was barely flickering and the spark almost extinguished. The angel did not appear to Elijah during his mountain top experience, but rather during his most desolate hour. To those who suffer, this should give you hope.

When we are experiencing our darkest hour, the Spirit's presence is exceptionally near. What a treasured thought to think that our beloved Father sent the Comforter (KJV), the Helper (NASB), the Counselor (NIV) (depending on which version you prefer), to encourage us always, but especially during the most depressed moments in life. These special titles aptly describe the role the Spirit fulfills.

The angel awakened Elijah and encouraged him to eat (a 200-mile trip is ahead of him), alluding to the fact that God was waiting for him at "the mountain of God," better known as Mt. Sinai. (1 Kings 19:8-9) *Note: Jewish tradition teaches, which seems very plausible, that "the" cave where God was waiting, mentioned in these verses, was the very cave Moses stood in when the Lord "passed by."*

Finally reaching Sinai, Elijah began the mountain's ascent. Filthy from weeks of travel through the wilderness, hair matted, feet bleeding, shivering and wretched, Elijah entered the cave and sat in a crumpled heap of humanity – all hope vanished. As he sat in silence again, longing to

feel the embrace of the Presence, he berated his human weakness. With his mind racing over recent events, he bent in agony, struggling between exaggerated self-pity and guilt for letting God down.

In the midst of Elijah's downward spiral of thoughts, God drew near, asking a simple, straight-to-the-point question: **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"** (1 Kings 19:9) How like God. He never minces words. He cuts through all the superlatives and gets to the point quickly. God already knew the answer to the question, but using the question He invited Elijah to "Come, let us reason together." How like God.

I can almost hear Elijah's whining sobs as he quickly spurts out his frustrations of the past few days and of course, reminds God of his faithful service. By this point in the story, most people condemn this broken man's faithlessness. Oh yes, we are quick to criticize and have so little compassion.

How like man (woman). Interesting . . . God does just the opposite. I am at a loss to find one word of scorn or condemnation in God's words or actions.

God always looks at the entire picture when He deals with the human race. He sees all the circumstances, understands our motives and knows all that we have been through. Instead of chastising, God worked with Elijah just as he was, bringing him back to reality, attempting to restore his hope and faith in the One who never left his side.

How like God! **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is *patient with you*, not wanting anyone to perish, but *everyone to come to repentance*."** (2 Peter 3:9 – italics mine)

Time to Choose

Notice that God asked Elijah to come out from his protected haven of rocks. It is as if God was saying, "Come out of the cave, Elijah. Come out to where your REAL protection is and stand firm." Yet Elijah, so overwhelmed with self-pity, did not move. A wind began to blow, gaining strength moment by moment, so strong that it literally threw huge boulders around like popping corn, ripping the mountain apart. The reality of God's power again became radiantly clear to Elijah.

God got his attention. Just when Elijah thought the display of power was over, the Earth began to tremble and shake. The intensity of the ground's movement beneath Elijah grew until the whole mountain felt like it was going to fall in upon itself. Suddenly, Elijah's perspective changed completely and when the rumbling finally subsided, I believe he no longer wanted to die, but was glad to be alive.

It is as if God asked: "Where is your protection, Elijah? Certainly not in that cave!" As Elijah clung to the rocky floor of the cave, an explosion of fire erupted and licked at the door of his cave, making his rocky refuge feel as hot as a furnace. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

No question now, God had Elijah's complete attention. As Elijah strained his ears in the silence to hear what may be coming next, he heard the unmistakable voice – God's gentle whisper. Yes, Elijah knew the voice and the time had come to meet his Maker.

What God whispered to Elijah is not recorded, but it was enough to make him move. I believe God was saying: "It is time, Elijah, decide. Who will you serve? Choose – exercise your faith!" God is the Master of the wind, Earth, and elements – He is Master of the entire universe. However, He will not do one thing. He will not choose for you. Elijah had to get up using his own free will and step out in faith before God would reveal His will to Elijah.

What a Plan!

Kept from Elijah's knowledge until the appropriate time, God had already established a plan and what a plan it was! First, Elijah was to anoint Hazael as King of Aram. (1 Kings 19:15) God would use the Arameans to declare war on Israel and punish Ahab, Jezebel and the entire apostate nation of Israel. Next, Elijah was to anoint a new king over Israel – Jehu: God had a plan and just the man to carry it out. Jehu had not bowed to Baal, and God would use this man to overthrow Ahab and Jezebel.

Finally, Elijah was to anoint another prophet. (1 Kings 19:16) Elisha would become Elijah's friend and successor. In addition to all this, God encouraged Elijah's weary heart. He assured Elijah that He had "reserved" 7,000 men and women, people who did not cave to Jezebel's demands. This select group (His chosen) would be used to cause a revival in Israel.

It seems inconceivable that after this entire "cave experience" Elijah obeyed only one of God's instructions. He anointed Elisha. Years later, after Ahab and several family successors had continued their evil course throughout the land of Israel, Elisha finally anointed Hazael (2 Kings 8:12-13) and Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-3).

I do not believe that Elijah's reluctance to do what God requested was a result of direct disobedience, but instead the result of a heart so weary and worn from the struggle, that he could not bring himself to do it. As Elijah returned to Israel, he traveled the same, dusty, wilderness path. Long hours and many miles gave him ample time to reflect on all that had happened. I believe Elijah felt entirely unworthy to do what God had asked him to do.

Knowing there was another man to be "chosen," Elijah convinced himself that Elisha was more worthy and could do a better job. God, in His great mercy and grace, completely understood Elijah's heart and why he chose not to obey.

Between Mt. Carmel and Mt. Sinai

For several years, Elijah and Elisha worked side-by-side, the younger learning from the more experienced. Elijah was a "seasoned" veteran and it must have reflected in every aspect of his life. I conclude this because when God finally called Elijah Home (translated to Heaven without experiencing death), all Elisha requested was "a double-portion of your spirit" (2 Kings 2: 9).

Something significant happened to Elijah between Mt. Carmel and Mt. Sinai. I find great comfort as I read about the great prophet's life after his Mt. Carmel experience. It tells me so much about the incredible God whom we serve. In spite of Elijah's lapse of duty regarding the anointing of Hazael and Jehu, God looked beyond and saw a man who loved Him with all of His heart. Elijah may have been too hard on himself regarding his failures, but I think his walk with God was closer because of them.

I believe Elijah's suffering made him more compassionate toward those who suffer and his own mistakes less critical toward those who fail. Yes, Elijah came to know God in a new, more intimate way during the days following Mt. Carmel – Elijah saw the side of God that was merciful and compassionate.

As a result, his countenance radiated with a love for his God that few could deny. The heart-wrenching experience between Mt. Carmel and Mt. Sinai had changed the man, I believe, for the better. You cannot go through an experience like that, being completely, emotionally broken, and not be changed.

The good news to all of us is that God **understands** every heartache and every aspect of human frailty. **"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."** (Hebrews 4:14-16)

God also sees our heart and knows that although we may fail miserably, we long to do what is right. Paul understood this well and remarked: **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the *desire* to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do –this I keep on doing . . . *For in my inner being I delight in God's law*; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Romans 7:18-18, 22-25 – italics mine)

Timely Advice Today

Elijah's story is timely for us today. We live in an age when the world seems terribly out of control. Tragedy and heartache abound. We are weary and long for a reprieve. As bad as it may seem, God predicts that the closing scenes just before His return will be far worse, and I often shake my head and wonder how anyone will survive. My own trials have taught me one valuable lesson of which I must continually remind myself.

God is far more concerned with developing my character and spiritual maturity, than I will ever be. So, He lovingly watches over me as I go through life, sometimes allowing me to experience

something that will help in my spiritual development.

Yet, if I were the master of my own destiny, I am certain I would choose another course by selecting the easiest path possible. Consequently, I would most likely lose eternal life. There is something in the equation of being a human being, dealing with sin and the resulting sufferings that refine us spiritually.

When referring to the days just before His second coming, Jesus said: **"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. *To him who overcomes*, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, *just as I overcame* and sat down with my Father on his throne."** (Revelation 3:18-21 – italics mine)

Now, remember Malachi's words when he predicted that the "spirit of Elijah" would be revived before the time of the end and then consider Daniel's words regarding this same time period:

"Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time." And later God told Daniel: **"Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand."** (Daniel 12: 9-10)

Notice that God allows His *chosen* to stumble, and like Elijah, during the agony of the stumbling process we truly meet and become intimately dependent upon God. This is the state of mind God wants – complete dependency! Unfortunately, for the human race, this is best learned when our backs are up against the wall or in Elijah's case, his face against a cave floor.

To be sure, Elijah had the "anointing" of God's power – he *boldly* spoke God's warning to King Ahab and *fearlessly* fulfilled all that God asked him to do through the Mt. Carmel experience. Yet, something about human beings and power is frightening – we get heady and misuse it – often becoming tyrants.

God understands our tendency to forget Who is the power. Moses had God's anointing as well, but remember Moses had a memory slip when he hit the rock in exasperation, instead of doing just as God had directed. **"He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, *must we* bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'" (Numbers 20:10-12)**

I am sure Moses was a broken man after he had time to reflect on all that had happened and mourned deeply over his rash attitude. Disappointments, complaining and belligerent people, weariness from the stress of meeting all the demands and rigors of the journey finally wore Moses down to a nub and he broke.

This sounds strangely familiar, doesn't it? God chose both Elijah and Moses to do a very special mission for Him. Both Elijah and Moses have preceded the human race to Heaven. (2 Kings 2:11-12; Jude 9; Matthew 11:3; Luke 9:30) And yes, both Elijah and Moses knew the thrill of victory and the sting of defeat.

What can we learn from all of this? It is my contention that the intensity of suffering we see around us today also indicates that God's people are in the refining process, being prepared for the days ahead.

Malachi put it this way: **"But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness . . ."** (Malachi 3:2-3)

And in Zechariah, God says of His chosen: **"In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" (Zechariah 13:8-9)**

So, whether we like it or not, we all are in for some hard times. Yet it helps to know that God is working for our own good (as Paul puts it in Romans 8), for the greater prize, our eternal salvation. Somehow, whether God ordained it or brought on by our own foolish choices, we too will one day face the Valley of Silence.

From what I can detect from my own experiences, it is a necessary step as we grow in our faith experience. Like Elijah, our human emotions must be tested and pushed to the limit. Our resolve must be stretched further than ever before, until a steely resolve finally forms within the heart to bend under the hand of the Almighty's will.

Complete surrender is absolutely necessary to experience complete victory. Jesus said: **"For I have come down from Heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me."** (John 7:38) Yes, given the chance, the Valley of Silence often produces giants of faith.

Elijah's mistakes and triumphs give me great hope. We serve a God who understands human frailty, but is willing to help His people move beyond their human limits and anoint them with holy boldness to give the final message to a waiting world.

When we are pushed beyond our human abilities, only then can we understand Paul's words of praise found in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4: **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus**

Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

This is what Elisha saw in Elijah after the Mt. Sinai experience. Elisha toiled daily next to a man whose life radiated comfort, compassion, love and mercy.

Yes, the spirit of Elijah will be seen in the final days of Earth's history, but there is a "twist" in the story that few of us contemplate seriously. God's power will be demonstrated as His people proclaim the truth boldly and fearlessly, offering God's salvation to millions.

Even more telling will be His chosen people's attitude toward individuals who have formerly caused them great emotional distress (the Bible calls them our enemies). The chosen will understand *experientially* the weakness of human frailty and have great compassion on all people, even those who despitefully used them.

The call for complete submission to God's authority will be offered to all people and the chosen will offer it in love. In God's stead and filled with His Spirit, they will say to the weak, weary, and broken of the world, "Come, let us reason together taste and see that the Lord is good."

What an incredible invitation! How like God!