

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES 4 March 2018: Elijah, a friend of God (1 Kings 19)

Moses had rescued God's people from Egypt, a task he had been appointed to and prepared for. God led them to the 'land of milk and honey', the land where he would care for them. In return, the people promised to live according to his laws.

But the people didn't keep their side of the bargain! Their good intentions didn't last.

Today's story takes place when Ahab was king of Israel. 1 Kgs 16:30 describes him like this: "He did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him" and adds that Ahab "did more to arouse the anger of the LORD ...than did all the kings of Israel before him." His wife, Jezebel was just as bad! She came from a land where the idol, Ba'al, was worshipped and, when she arrived in Israel, she killed off the priests of God who objected to this new religion. She also brought in 850 priests to serve her idols. Ahab kept her happy by building a temple for Baal and by worshipping there with her. He regarded God as 'just another god', reckoning he and his people were God's favourites so they could do just what they wanted and God would still look after them!

But they were wrong! God was angry. He cannot tolerate evil and had warned his people constantly that he would punish them if they disobeyed his perfect law. Now the time had come.

He sent Elijah, to warn King Ahab that there was going to be a drought – much worse than we have had here in the Western Cape! There would be no dew or rain until the people started to remember their promises again. Imagine going to tell the king that! It didn't exactly make Elijah popular!

But Elijah had a more important friend than a king! He was God's friend and so God sent him away out of Ahab's reach. God provided him with safety and food (via ravens) and water from a stream. When that stream, Cherith, dried up, God sent him to a widow in the land from which Jezebel came! Obviously, the drought was a problem there too because when Elijah begged this woman for some water and some bread, she replied that she couldn't help him. She only had enough for one more meal for her son and herself.

Because she was willing to share that meal with Elijah, God provided for them all even though the widow and her son weren't believers. God ensured that her pot of flour and her pot of olive oil never ran out! Surely she must have begun to realise that God was stronger than her idols.

Then her son died and immediately she attacked Elijah and his God. Elijah prayed desperately and followed God's commands. God provided and the "life came into the child again and he revived". King Ahab and his wife may have hated Elijah and God, but that widow did not!

When God decided to end the suffering of the drought, God sent Elijah back to Ahab. Ahab came to meet him and accused Elijah of being the one who was troubling Israel!!! Elijah realised that talking to Ahab wouldn't be enough! So he set up a contest on Mount Carmel, a hill sacred to both Baal and God. The priests of Ba'al begged their god to light their sacrifice with his lightning. Of course he couldn't, but God provided enough fire to burn the wet stone altar, the water and the soaked sacrifice. And once the people admitted that he was the true God, God provided rain.

Ahab rushed home to Jezebel to avoid getting wet, and God provided Elijah with enough energy and speed to run 27kms in front of Ahab's chariot!

Jezebel was furious that her god had been beaten and destroyed! She vowed to kill Elijah and he ran “for his life” (1 Kgs 19:3). And suddenly, although God had provided everything for him, Elijah felt weak and exhausted and depressed, just wanting to die.

God didn’t get angry. He knew this wasn’t weird. We do get exhausted, even when we work for God. Instead God twice provided food and a jug of water, right there in the wilderness where Elijah had fallen into an exhausted sleep. With that food inside him, Elijah travelled down to the very mountain where God has spoken to Moses.

But Elijah still felt isolated and lost. So God set up a meeting, to encourage him. First came a huge wind breaking the mountain and the rocks, but God was not in the wind. Then came an earthquake, but God wasn’t in that. Then came a fire, but God wasn’t in that. Eventually God spoke out of the deep silence after these storms. Perhaps God was showing that he wasn’t just there when huge things were happening. God would provide comfort for Elijah even when he was surrounded by silence, even when he was alone and weak and depressed.

Elijah’s story is like a kaleidoscope of miraculous happenings and hard times. But he learned a lesson we all need to know: God will provide for our needs.

Memory verse: “Do not be anxious about anything but present your requests to God” Phil 4:6