



1 Kings 19:9b-18  
 The Story  
 God's Messengers: One-Name Wonders<sup>i</sup>

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 January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Sometimes, people become so famous that they're known by just one name – sometimes their first, sometimes their last, sometimes a nickname...but one name is all you need in order to know who they are: Napoleon; Michelangelo; Mozart, Oprah; Madonna; Jordan; Pele; Pavarotti; Bono. One name: and for better or for worse, you know who they are, what they are known for, or what they stand for. It makes me wonder: when they were younger and their parents really wanted to get their attention, did their parents use first, middle, last name? (“Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart!...”) or did they just need to call them by the one name?

Well, throughout the Bible, we have all kinds of people who are just known by their one name...mostly because last names weren't a part of their culture. But even if they had last names, I think many of them would just be known by their first name. For example: Adam, Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, Lydia, David, Peter, Mary, John, Paul, George and Ringo...Just making sure you're paying attention! And of course, Jesus: whose last name is not “Christ” because that's a title...it's the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, “Messiah” which means, “Anointed.”

**And some of the most famous one-name wonders of the Bible are the Old Testament Prophets.** We don't always know lots about them because much of their writings are among the most difficult to grasp in all of the Bible, and they're often grounded in a context that is quite foreign to us (the whole Bible is, essentially, but something about the prophets especially seems foreign to us). So we tend not to pay as much attention to their lives and their message. But: we oftentimes know their names....we recognize them: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Haggai, Micah, and more. Many of our best-known Bible verses come from these prophets of old... and while some are well-known, others are a little more obscure, or there will be bits of information about them that many people don't know. For instance, there's the prophet who has a cookie named after him. Did you know that? Famous Amos. (OK, the cookie isn't, as far as I know, named after the prophet Amos.) Or some people don't know that there's an Italian prophet. Do you

know who that is? Malachi (ma-LAH-tchee). ☺ All of those I've named so far are just some of the ones with books of the Bible named after them that contain their message/messages. There are others whose teachings and messages and lives are documented in other books of the Bible – like 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles: such as Oded, Elisha, and Elijah, whom we read about this morning.

**One of the things that makes them difficult to follow is that some of the prophets were based in the northern kingdom, and some were based in the southern kingdom.** So the context, and the history is difficult to keep track of some times. If you'll recall from December 17<sup>th</sup> when we were last in this series, we saw how the nation of Israel became divided into two Kingdoms – Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. Well, there were prophets in each – though most of the Biblical prophets come from the south. And to confuse things more, some of the prophets operated in and spoke to the people and the leaders in both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

This morning we are looking at some of the events, and message, of Elijah - who was from the northern kingdom, Israel, though the passage we read this morning is from a spiritual retreat he took in the wilderness of the southern kingdom, Judah. He does not have a book of the Bible named after him, though that certainly does not make him any less important than those who do. His life and message are recorded in 1 Kings 17-19, and this morning's passage came out of 1 Kings 19.

Elijah's primary message was that the god of the Canaanites was not the one true God worth worshipping. This god was called Baal. Here's a little bit about Baal: **“According to Canaanite mythology, Baal was the son of El, the chief god, and Asherah, the goddess of the sea. Baal was considered the most powerful of all gods, eclipsing El, who was seen as rather weak and ineffective. In various battles Baal defeated Yamm, the god of the sea, and Mot, the god of death and the underworld. Baal's sisters/consorts were Ashtoreth, a fertility goddess associated with the stars, and Anath, a goddess of love and war. The Canaanites worshiped Baal as the sun god and as the storm god—he is usually depicted holding**

**a lightning bolt—who defeated enemies and produced crops. They also worshiped him as a fertility god who provided children. Baal worship was rooted in sensuality and involved ritualistic prostitution in the temples. At times, appeasing Baal required human sacrifice, usually the firstborn of the one making the sacrifice (Jeremiah 19:5). The priests of Baal appealed to their god in rites of wild abandon which included loud, ecstatic cries and self-inflicted injury (1 Kings 18:28)” (From [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)).<sup>ii</sup>**

When the Hebrews first came into the Promised Land, several hundred years before this, they were commanded by God to rid the land of Baal worship, and worship of other gods, so that their own worship would not become contaminated. This is always something we have to be careful of in our own lives. The gods we seek to worship may not have names like Baal and Ashtoreth...but there are always things seeking to corrupt our worship of and relationship with our Heavenly Father such as power, prestige, money, and more.

And what we see in the life of the nation of Israel is that they didn't do everything God asked them to do, and the people of Canaan and other people groups who were there were allowed to continue in their worship, and eventually these worship practices and their deities became intermingled with the Israelites' worship of Yahweh, the God of the Bible and Lord of all Creation. Especially in the northern kingdom this was problematic, but it crept into the southern kingdom, too.

**So Elijah's message was one of calling the Israelites back to worshipping Yahweh alone.** Really, this is at the heart of the message of all the prophets: calling people back to their relationship with God. That's what Biblical prophecy is really about. At one point, to demonstrate that Yahweh is the one true God, Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest where there were two bulls sacrificed – one to Baal and one to Yahweh. The sacrificed animals were each then set upon a big pile of wood. And then the 450 prophets of Baal called out to their god for an entire day to start the wood on fire and burn the sacrificial offering. Nothing happened in spite of their hysterics and all that they did.

Then Elijah called out to Yahweh. God hears his cry and the wood catches fire and the offering is burned. It was a demonstration of the power of God, and an effort to show who's God is real and actually worth listening to and being in relationship with. In an effort to finally eradicate the Baal worship, as should have been done several hundred years earlier, the prophets of Baal are killed. This causes great distress for Elijah. **We read in 19:3, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."** This verse can very easily be translated to mean, **"Elijah stood in awe/reverence and went for a walk for his soul."** In fact, the word that is translated "life" is the word "Nephesh" and 475 times out of 753 occurrences, it is translated as "soul." It's translated as "life" only 117 times. The word for "ran" actually just means "walk" or "go." Only "afraid" which is the Hebrew word, "yareh" is translated into its usual meaning, "afraid" or "fear," but it can mean to revere, or stand in awe of.

If we go with translating "fear" to the more minority sense of "stand in awe of" and then allow "ran" and "life" to be translated in the majority ways of "walk" and "soul" then this is how things read, **"Elijah stood in awe and went for a walk for his soul. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors (1 Kings 19:4).'"** Considering that his prayer is for God to end his life, it seems odd that he would run from threats to his life, which is another reason I think it's better to translate the Hebrew differently. And even if his prayer is an emotional overstatement, and he doesn't really want God to take his life, his whole experience in the wilderness outside Beersheba is a time of caring for his soul. There seems to be a purpose to this other than just running from a threat to his life; this is a retreat into the wilderness to get some care for his nephesh...for his soul...to be refreshed and encouraged in his calling and his ministry.

As is often the case when we are spiritually (or emotionally) dry and in need of some soul care, he wasn't taking good care of himself, physically. He hadn't been eating or drinking water. Food and drink are provided twice by someone that many of our English translations in 19:5 and 7 call an "angel."

**The Hebrew word, however, is simply the common word for “messenger” and I think this is more the intent here.** There’s nothing wrong with “angel” but it conjures up images of heavenly beings with wings and halos descending to his aid. And maybe that is who came to his aid. But it may also be that the Lord simply prompted someone who was walking by – remember he’s only a day’s journey outside this city – to lay some food down next to him as he was sleeping. If someone did that for us, we might very well say, “whoever did that was such an angel” and we don’t envision that they had wings and a halo. Either way, Elijah eats and drinks and then continues along in his journey, which is where our passage we read this morning picks things up. And he’s looking for some soul comfort...a sign that God is with him...a sense of security and encouragement in the midst of a depleting and challenging time. Have you ever been in a similar place?

**We see here that Elijah is very relatable to us. He’s not above dejection...maybe even depression...he’s not super-spiritual, and neither are we.** He’s already prayed that God would just end his life, as we saw in verse 4. Perhaps that was an over-statement and he doesn’t really mean it. We all have done things like that before. After I separated my shoulder 6 weeks ago or so, I had thoughts of never playing touch football again – with my kids, cousins, friends, anyone. I had thoughts of no more sports at all – basketball, skiing, etc. The fact is, I’ll probably play football again, even this summer, when the weather gets warm again...and might ski at the end of the ski year and hope to be back on the basketball court in a number of weeks, too. We all have had these kinds of overreactions at times in our lives, both in times of dejection and in times of elation. So Elijah’s not so different. And even though he doesn’t actually say this, we can deduce that he’s looking for God to meet him where he is and bring some comfort and reassurance that God is with Him. It’s another reason why I think verse 3 should be read as him getting up and going for a walk to care for his soul.

**So even though he doesn’t ask for God to comfort and encourage him, the Lord knows his heart, and that’s what he does.** God will come to us and reveal himself to us whether we ask him to or not. It’s His initiative – though it certainly never hurts to get into a new location, away from the distractions of life, and intentionally spend some time caring for the soul.

Elijah is a good model for us. So God directs him to go out of the cave where he is, for the presence of the Lord is going to come by. Elijah does go out, but not until he senses the presence of the Lord. And the presence of the Lord is not in the wind...it's not in the earthquake...and it's not in the fire. **The presence of the Lord is in the gentle whisper. We don't know *exactly* what that means, but clearly: it stands in stark contrast to the violence of the wind, earthquake, and fire that came before.** And that's interesting because it was fire that was a sign of God's presence and power earlier in that challenge with the prophets of Baal. But this time, the presence of God was not in the fire. Other times we see God's presence in a curtain being torn in two, in earthquakes, in the darkening of the sun and other really obvious signs of power. And it makes me wonder: How do you discern and hear the voice of God?

And I don't necessarily mean that in an audible kind of way...In fact, the Hebrew word here that gets translated as "said" ("A voice said to him" verse 13) is the word "amar," and it really means "came to." It's the same word used in verse 10 when we read that the word of the Lord "came to him" which conveys less of an audible voice and more of a sense that God was there and conveying something to him. So back to my question: **How do you "hear" the "voice" of God? How do you know that God is with you? How do you know God's leading, his directives, his comforting? How do you know when God is caring for your soul, and that you need that soul care?**

It may be a little different for each person. Some we probably have in common: through Scripture, through a sermon, through a song, through a friend, through prayer, through the events of life where we can see God's directing hand. **This is important for us to understand and be sensitive to, because God's prophets who go by one name aren't the only ones who hear God, who need soul care, and who speak into other people's lives about their relationship with God.** It's not just the one-name wonders like Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah who are God's messengers. You and I "hear" God as well. In fact, you and I *need* to "hear" God's voice...we need the word of the Lord to come to us...and we also have a mission and a ministry to help others be in relationship with God as well. All of that is not

just the work of the religious leaders like Elijah. In fact, contrary to Elijah's statement that he's the only one in all of Israel that is walking with the Lord, God tells him in verse 18 that there are 7,000 others who have not bowed to Baal. There are 7,000 others who can serve as God's Messengers. There's a word of encouragement for him right there!

And just the same: **You and I are God's Messengers as well.** We're part of those 7,000...though there are a whole lot more, of course. We may not be famous one-name Messengers like Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah and Jeremiah...we may not be the Michelangelo or Oprah of the faith...but just because you have a first, middle and last name that doesn't mean God can't work through you as His messenger. So take some time to tend to your soul. Create space for the word of God to come to you – through Bible study, through prayer, through other Christians in your life...and let God work through you to encourage others in their journey of faith as well.

And ultimately, I pray that your life and my life would point people to the one name they need to cling to, to the name of Jesus. No Baals needed. No worship of money or power or position needed. Jesus is not just a one-name wonder...he's the one name savior that we all need. **He's the name above every name (Philippians 2:9), the one and only name given under heaven by which people will be saved (Acts 4:12).** And I pray that in 2018 your life and my life and our lives collectively as a church, would proclaim that one name above all others so that one day every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

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<sup>i</sup> Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 15 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/who-Baal.html>