

## ELIJAH ~ ANGEL OF INNOCENCE


**DOMINION:** By Jewish tradition, this angel is a guardian angel to new-born children and to all who die at a young age. Also believed to be the Angel who created the "Tree of Life."

**GUIDANCE:** Angel of Innocence

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# Elijah

This article is about the prophet in various religious texts. For other uses, see Elijah (disambiguation).

Elijah (Elias)	
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<i>An icon of Elijah from Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai</i>	
<b>Born</b>	Tishbe, Gilad

**Elijah** (Hebrew: אֵלִיָּהוּ, *Eliyahu*, meaning "My God is Yahweh")<sup>[1][2]</sup> or **Elias** (/ɪˈlɑːəs/; Greek: Ἠλίας, *Elías*; Russian: Илья, *Ilya*; Latin: *Helias*; Arabic: إلياس, *Ilyās*) was a prophet and a wonder-worker in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahab (9th century BC), according to the biblical Books of Kings. According to the Books of Kings, Elijah defended the worship of Yahweh over that of the Canaanite god Baal (which was considered as idol worship); he raised the dead, brought fire down from the sky, and was taken up in a whirlwind (either accompanied by a chariot and horses of flame or riding in it). In the Book of Malachi, Elijah's return is prophesied "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord," making him a harbinger of the Messiah and the eschaton in various faiths that revere the Hebrew Bible. Derivative references to Elijah appear in the Talmud, Mishnah, the New Testament and the Qur'an.

In Judaism Elijah's name is invoked at the weekly Havdalah ritual that marks the end of Shabbat, and Elijah is invoked in other Jewish customs, among them the Passover seder and the Brit milah (ritual circumcision). He appears in numerous stories and references in the Haggadah and rabbinic literature, including the Babylonian Talmud.

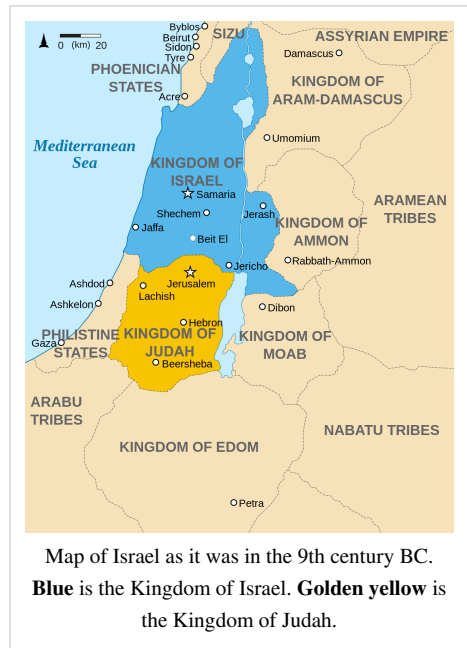
In Christianity the New Testament describes how both Jesus and John the Baptist are compared with Elijah and on some occasions thought by some to be manifestations of Elijah, and Elijah appears with Moses during the Transfiguration of Jesus. Elijah is also a figure in various Christian folk traditions, often identified with earlier pagan thunder or sky gods.

In the Qur'an and certain Islamic traditions, Elijah is described as a great and righteous prophet of God and one who powerfully preached against the worship of Ba'al.

## Biblical narratives and historical background

By the 9th century BC, the Kingdom of Israel, once united under King Solomon, was divided into the northern Kingdom of Israel and southern Kingdom of Judah, which retained the historic seat of government and focus of the Israelite religion at the Temple in Jerusalem. Omri, King of Israel, continued policies dating from the reign of Jeroboam, contrary to the laws of Moses, that were intended to reorient religious focus away from Jerusalem: encouraging the building of local temple altars for sacrifices, appointing priests from outside the family of the Levites, and allowing or encouraging temples dedicated to the Canaanite god, Baal.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Omri achieved domestic security with a marriage alliance between his son Ahab and princess Jezebel, a priestess of Baal and the daughter of the king of Sidon in Phoenicia.<sup>[5]</sup> These solutions brought security and economic prosperity to Israel for a time,<sup>[6]</sup> but did not bring peace with the Israelite prophets, who were interested in a strict deuteronomic interpretation of Mosaic law.

As King, Ahab exacerbated these tensions. Ahab allowed worship of a foreign god in the palace, building a temple for Baal, and allowing Jezebel to bring a large entourage of priests and prophets of Baal and Asherah into the country. It is in this context that Elijah is introduced in 1 Kings 17:1<sup>[7]</sup> as Elijah "The Tishbite". He warns Ahab that there will be years of catastrophic drought so severe that not even dew will fall, because Ahab and his queen stand at the end of a line of kings of Israel who are said to have "done evil in the sight of the Lord."



## 1st and 2nd Kings



*Elijah in the wilderness*, by Washington Allston.

No background for the person of Elijah is given. His name in Hebrew means "My God is Yahweh", and may be a title applied to him because of his challenge to worship of Baal.<sup>[8][9][10][11]</sup>

Elijah's challenge, characteristic of his behavior in other episodes of his story as told in the Bible, is bold and direct. Baal was the Canaanite god responsible for rain, thunder, lightning, and dew. Elijah not only challenges Baal on behalf of his own God, Yahweh, he challenges Jezebel, her priests, Ahab and the people of Israel.

### Widow of Zarephath

Main article: Raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath

After Elijah's confrontation with Ahab, God tells him to flee out of Israel, to a hiding place by the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan, where he will be fed by ravens. When the brook dries up, God sends him to a widow living in the town of Zarephath in Phoenicia. When Elijah finds her and asks to be fed, she says that she does not have sufficient food to keep her and her own son alive. Elijah tells her that God will not allow her supply of flour or oil to run out, saying, "Don't be afraid..this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" She feeds him the last of their food, and Elijah's promise miraculously comes true; thus, by an act of faith the woman received the promised blessing. God gave her "manna" from heaven even while he was withholding food from his unfaithful people in the promised land. Some time later the widow's son dies and the widow cries, "Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" Moved by a faith like that of Abraham (Romans 4:17, Hebrews 11:19), Elijah prays that God might restore her son

so that the veracity and trustworthiness of God's word might be demonstrated. 1 Kings 17:22 <sup>[12]</sup> relates how God "heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived." This is the first instance of raising the dead recorded in Scripture. This non-Israelite widow was granted the best covenant blessing in the person of her son, the only hope for a widow in ancient society. The widow cried, "...the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." She made a confession that the Israelites had failed to make.

After more than three years of drought and famine, God tells Elijah to return to Ahab and announce the end of the drought: not occasioned by repentance in Israel but by the command of the Lord, who had determined to reveal himself again to his people. While on his way, Elijah meets Obadiah, the head of Ahab's household, who had hidden a hundred prophets of the God of Israel when Ahab and Jezebel had been killing them. Elijah sends Obadiah back to Ahab to announce his return to Israel.

### Challenge to Baal

When Ahab confronts Elijah, he refers to him as the "troubler of Israel." Elijah responds by throwing the charge back at Ahab, saying that it is Ahab who has troubled Israel by allowing the worship of false gods. Elijah then berates both the people of Israel and Ahab for their acquiescence in Baal worship. "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21 <sup>[13]</sup>). And the people were silent. The Hebrew for this word, "go limping" or "waver", is the same as that used for "danced" in verse 26, where the prophets of Baal frantically dance. Elijah speaks with sharp irony: in the religious ambivalence of Israel, she is engaging in a wild and futile religious "dance".



A statue of Elijah in the Cave of Elijah, Mount Carmel, Israel.

At this point Elijah proposes a direct test of the powers of Baal and Yahweh. The people of Israel, 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of Asherah are summoned to Mount Carmel. Two altars are built, one for Baal and one for Yahweh. Wood is laid on the altars. Two oxen are slaughtered and cut into pieces; the pieces are laid on the wood. Elijah then invites the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. They pray from morning to noon without success. Elijah ridicules their efforts. They respond by cutting themselves and adding their own blood to the sacrifice (such mutilation of the body was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic law). They continue praying until evening without success.

Elijah now orders that the altar of Yahweh be drenched with water from "four large jars" poured three times (1 Kings 18:33–34 <sup>[14]</sup>). He asks God to accept the sacrifice. Fire falls from the sky, consuming the water, the sacrifice and the stones of the altar itself as well. Elijah seizes the moment and orders the death of the prophets of Baal. Elijah prays earnestly for rain to fall again on the land. Then the rains begin, signaling the end of the famine.



## Mount Horeb

Jezebel, enraged that Elijah had ordered the deaths of her priests, threatens to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:1–13 <sup>[15]</sup>). This was Elijah's first encounter with Jezebel, and not the last. Later Elijah would prophesy about Jezebel's death, because of her sin. Later, Elijah flees to Beersheba in Judah, continues alone into the wilderness, and finally sits down under a Retamaine shrub, praying for death. He falls asleep under the tree; an angel touches him and tells him to wake up and eat. When he awakens he finds bread and a jar of water. He eats, drinks, and goes back to sleep. The angel comes a second time and tells him to eat and drink because he has a long journey ahead of him.

Elijah travels for forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. Elijah is the only person described in the Bible as returning to Horeb, after Moses and his generation had left Horeb several centuries before. He seeks shelter in a cave. God again speaks to Elijah (1 Kings 19:9 <sup>[16]</sup>): "What doest thou here, Elijah?". Elijah did not give a direct answer to the Lord's question but evades and equivocates, implying that the work the Lord had begun centuries earlier had now come to nothing, and that his own work was fruitless. Unlike Moses, who tried to defend Israel when they sinned with the golden calf, Elijah bitterly complains over the Israelites' unfaithfulness and says he is the "only one left". Up until this time Elijah has only the word of God to guide him, but now he is told to go outside the cave and "stand before the Lord." A terrible wind passes, but God is not in the wind. A great earthquake shakes the mountain, but God is not in the earthquake. Then a fire passes the mountain, but God is not in the fire. Then a "still small voice" comes to Elijah and asks again, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah again evades the question and his lament is unrevised, showing that he did not understand the importance of the divine revelation he had just witnessed. God then sends him out again, this time to Damascus to anoint Hazael as king of Syria, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as his replacement.



Elijah's offering is consumed by fire from heaven in a stained glass window at St. Matthew's German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Charleston, South Carolina



The Cave of Elijah, Mount Carmel, Israel.

## Vineyard of Naboth

Elijah encounters Ahab again in 1 Kings 21 <sup>[17]</sup>, after Ahab has acquired possession of a vineyard by murder. Ahab desires to have the vineyard of Naboth of Jezreel. He offers a better vineyard or a fair price for the land. But Naboth tells Ahab that God has told him not to part with the land. Ahab accepts this answer with sullen bad grace. Jezebel, however, plots a method for acquiring the land. She sends letters, in Ahab's name, to the elders and nobles who lived near Naboth. They are to arrange a feast and invite Naboth. At the feast, false charges of cursing God and Ahab are to be made against him. The

plot is carried out and Naboth is stoned to death. When word comes that Naboth is dead, Jezebel tells Ahab to take possession of the vineyard.

God again speaks to Elijah and sends him to confront Ahab with a question and a prophecy: "Have you killed and also taken possession?" and, "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick up your own blood" (1 Kings 21:19 <sup>[18]</sup>). Ahab begins the confrontation by calling Elijah his enemy. Elijah responds by throwing the charge back at him, telling him that he has made himself the enemy of God by his own actions. Elijah then goes beyond the prophecy he was given and tells Ahab that his entire kingdom will reject his authority; that Jezebel will be eaten by dogs within Jezreel; and that his family will be consumed by dogs as well (if they die in a city) or by birds (if they die in the country). When Ahab hears this he repents to such a degree that God relents in punishing Ahab but will punish Jezebel and their son—Ahaziah.

### Ahaziah

Elijah continues now from Ahab to an encounter with Ahaziah. The scene opens with Ahaziah seriously injured in a fall. He sends to the priests of Baalzebub in Ekron, outside the kingdom of Israel, to know if he will recover. Elijah intercepts his messengers and sends them back to Ahaziah with a message. In typical Elijah fashion, the message begins with a blunt, impertinent question: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron?" (2 Kings 1:6 <sup>[19]</sup>). Ahaziah asks the messengers to describe the person who gave them this message. They tell him he wore a hairy coat with a leather belt and he instantly recognizes the description as Elijah the Tishbite.

Ahaziah sends out three groups of soldiers to arrest Elijah. The first two are destroyed by fire which Elijah calls down from heaven. The leader of the third group asks for mercy for himself and his men. Elijah agrees to accompany this third group to Ahaziah, where he gives his prophecy in person.



Russian icon of the Prophet Elijah, 18th century (Iconostasis of Kizhi monastery, Karelia, Russia).

### Departure

Elijah, in company with Elisha (Eliseus), approaches the Jordan. He rolls up his mantle and strikes the water (2 Kings 2:8 <sup>[20]</sup>). The water immediately divides and Elijah and Elisha cross on dry land. Suddenly, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appear and Elijah is lifted up in a whirlwind. As Elijah is lifted up, his mantle falls to the ground and Elisha picks it up.

### Final mention: 2nd Chronicles

Elijah is mentioned once more in 2 Chronicles 21 <sup>[21]</sup>, which will be his final mention in the Hebrew Bible. A letter is sent under the prophet's name to Jehoram of Judah. It tells him that he has led the people of Judah astray in the same way that Israel was led astray. The prophet ends the letter with a prediction of a painful death. This letter is a puzzle to readers for several reasons. First, it concerns a king of the southern kingdom, while Elijah concerned himself with the kingdom of Israel. Second, the message begins with "Thus says YHVH, God of your father David..." rather than the more usual "...in the name of YHVH the God of Israel." Also, this letter seems to come after Elijah's



Saint Elias in the cave (below) and on a chariot of fire. A fresco from Rila Monastery, Bulgaria, medieval Orthodox tradition, renovated 20th century

ascension into the whirlwind. Jacob Myers suggests a number of possible reasons for this letter, among them that it may be an example of a better known prophet's name being substituted for that of a lesser known prophet.<sup>[22]</sup> John Van Seters, however, rejects the letter as having any connection with the Elijah tradition.<sup>[23]</sup> However Michael Wilcock, formally of Trinity College, Bristol, argues that Elijah's letter: 'does address a very 'northern' situation in the southern kingdom', and thus is authentic.<sup>[24]</sup>

## The Christian End of Elijah in Malachi

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

— Malachi 4:5–6

While the final mention of Elijah in the Hebrew Bible is in the Book of Chronicles, the Christian Bible's reversal of the ordering of the books of the Hebrew Bible in order to place the Book of Malachi, which prophesies a messiah, immediately before the Christian Gospels, means that Elijah's final "Old Testament" appearance is in the Book of Malachi, where it is written, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." That day is described as the burning of a great furnace, "... so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 3:19<sup>[25]</sup>) Traditionally, in Judaism, this is taken to mean the return of Elijah will precede the Messiah. In Christianity it is traditionally believed that the ministry of John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy. Additionally, these verses are believed to represent Elijah having a role in the end-times, immediately before the second coming of Jesus.

## Textual analysis

According to one recent researcher, the Elijah stories were added to the Deuteronomistic History in four stages. The first stage dates from the final edition of the History, about 560 BC, when the three stories of Naboth's vineyard, the death of Ahaziah, and the story of Jehu's coup were included to embody the themes of the reliability of God's word and the cycle of Baal worship and religious reform in the history of the Northern Kingdom. The narratives about the Omride wars were added shortly afterwards to illustrate a newly introduced theme, that the attitude of the king towards the word of the prophets determines the fate of Israel. 1 Kings 17–18<sup>[26]</sup> was added in early post-Exilic times (after 538 BC) to demonstrate the possibility of a new life in community with God after the time of judgment. In the fifth century BC, 1 Kings 19:1–18<sup>[27]</sup> and the remaining Elisha stories were inserted to give prophecy a legitimate foundation in the history of Israel.

## In the Aggadah and Talmud

Jewish legends about Elijah abound in the aggadah, which is found throughout various collections of rabbinic literature, including the Babylonian Talmud. This varied literature does not merely discuss his life, but has created a new history of him, which, beginning with his death – or "translation" – ends only with the close of the history of the human race. The volume of references to Elijah in Jewish Tradition stands in marked contrast to that in the Canon. As in the case of most figures of Jewish legend, so in the case of Elijah, the biblical account became the basis of later legend. Elijah the precursor of the Messiah, Elijah zealous in the cause of God, Elijah the helper in distress: these are the three leading notes struck by the Aggadah, endeavoring to complete the biblical picture with the Elijah legends. His career is extensive, colorful, and varied. He has appeared the world over in the guise of a beggar and scholar.

From the time of Malachi, who says of Elijah that God will send him before "the great and dreadful day" (Mal. 3:23), down to the later stories of the Chasidic rabbis, reverence and love, expectation and hope, were always connected in the Jewish consciousness with Elijah.



## Origin

Since, according to the Bible, Elijah lived a mysterious life, the Aggadah naturally did not fail to supply the biblical gaps in its own way. In the first place, it was its aim to describe more precisely Elijah's origin, since the biblical (1 Kings 17:1 <sup>[28]</sup>) "Elijah the Tishbite, [*who was*] of the inhabitants of Gilead", was too vague.

Three different theories regarding Elijah's origin are presented in the Aggadah literature: (1) he belonged to the tribe of Gad (Midrash Genensis Rabbah lxxi.) (2) he was a Benjamite from Jerusalem, identical with the Elijah mentioned in I Chron. viii:27 (3) he was a priest.

That Elijah was a priest is a statement which is made by many Church fathers also (Aphraates, "Homilies," ed. Wright, p. 314; Epiphanius, "Hæres." Iv. 3, *passim*), and which was afterward generally accepted. In some later works some rabbis speculate that he is to be identified with Phinehas (Pirke R. El. xlvii.; Targ. Yer. on Num. xxv. 12)

Mention must also be made of a statement which, though found only in the later Kabbalistic literature (Yalqut Reubeni, Bereshit, 9a, ed. Amsterdam), seems nevertheless to be very old (see Epiphanius, l.c.). Wikipedia:Please clarify According to this legend Elijah was really an angel in human form, so that he had neither parents nor offspring. Wikipedia:Citation needed See Melchizedek.

## Elijah's Zeal for God

In spite of Elijah's many miracles, the mass of the Jewish people remained as godless as before. A midrash tells that they even abolished the sign of the covenant, and the prophet had to appear as Israel's accuser before God (Pirke R. El. xxix.).

In the same cave where God once appeared to Moses and revealed Himself as gracious and merciful, Elijah was summoned to appear before God. By this summons he perceived that he should have appealed to God's mercy, instead of becoming Israel's accuser. The prophet, however, remained relentless in his zeal and severity, so that God commanded him to appoint his successor (Tanna debe Eliyahu Zuṭa viii.).

The vision in which God revealed Himself to Elijah gave him at the same time a picture of the destinies of man, who has to pass through "four worlds." This world was shown to the prophet in the form of the wind, since it disappears as the wind; storm () is the day of death, before which man trembles (); fire is the judgment in Gehenna, and the stillness is the last day (Tan., Peḳude, p. 128, Vienna ed.).

Three years after this vision (Seder 'Olam R. xvii.) Elijah was "translated." Concerning the place to which Elijah was transferred, opinions differ among Jews and Christians, but the old view was that Elijah was received among the heavenly inhabitants, where he records the deeds of men (Ḳid. 70; Ber. R. xxxiv. 8), a task which according to the apocalyptic literature is entrusted to Enoch.

But as early as the middle of the 2nd century, when the notion of translation to heaven was very much changed by Christian theologians, the assertion was made that Elijah never entered into heaven proper (Suk. 5a). In later literature paradise is generally designated as the abode of Elijah (compare Pirke R. El. xvi.), but since the location of paradise is itself uncertain, the last two statements may be identical.



The statue of Elijah at the Saint Elias Cathedral, Aleppo, Syria

## Elijah in Judaism

### Elijah's chair

See also: Brit milah

At Jewish circumcision ceremonies, a chair is set aside for the use of the prophet Elijah. Elijah is said to be a witness at all circumcisions when the sign of the covenant is placed upon the body of the child. This custom stems from the incident at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19<sup>[29]</sup>): Elijah had arrived at Mount Horeb after the demonstration of God's presence and power on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18<sup>[30]</sup>) God asks Elijah to explain his arrival, and Elijah replies: "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10<sup>[31]</sup>). According to Rabbinic tradition, Elijah's words were patently untrue (1 Kings 18:4<sup>[32]</sup> and 1 Kings 19:18<sup>[33]</sup>), and since Elijah accused Israel of failing to uphold the covenant, God would require Elijah to be present at every covenant of circumcision.<sup>[34][35]</sup>



"Chair of Elijah" used during the brit milah (circumcision) ceremony. The Hebrew inscription reads "This is the chair of Elijah, remembered for Good."

### Elijah's cup

See also: Passover Seder

In the Talmudic literature, Elijah would visit rabbis to help solve particularly difficult legal problems. Malachi had cited Elijah as the harbinger of the eschaton. Thus, when confronted with reconciling impossibly conflicting laws or rituals, the rabbis would set aside any decision "until Elijah comes."<sup>[36]</sup>

One such decision was whether the Passover seder required four or five cups of wine. Each serving of wine corresponds to one of the "four expressions of redemption" in the Book of Exodus:

"I am the Lord, and *I will bring you out* from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and *I will deliver you* from their bondage, and *I will redeem you* with an out-stretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and *I will take you* for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Exodus 6:6–7<sup>[37]</sup>).

The next verse, "And *I will bring you* into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord." (Exodus 6:8<sup>[38]</sup>) was not fulfilled until the generation following the Passover story, and the rabbis could not decide whether this verse counted as part of the Passover celebration (thus deserving of another serving of wine). Thus, a cup was left for the arrival of Elijah.

In practice the fifth cup has come to be seen as a celebration of future redemption. Today, a place is reserved at the seder table and a cup of wine is placed there for Elijah. During the seder, the door of the house is opened and Elijah is invited in. Traditionally, the cup is viewed as Elijah's and is used for no other purpose.<sup>[39]</sup>

## Havdalah

See also: Havdalah

Havdalah is the ceremony that concludes the Sabbath Day (Saturday evening in Jewish tradition). As part of the concluding hymn, an appeal is made to God that Elijah will come during the following week. "Elijah the Prophet, Elijah the Tishbite. Let him come quickly, in our day with the messiah, the son of David."

## Birkat HaMazon

See also: Birkat Hamazon

Elijah is invoked in the *Harachaman* section of the *Birkat Hamazon*, the Grace After Meals, in his role as messianic herald. It says,

"הַרְחֵם, הוֹאֵא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַנָּבִיא זְכוּר לְטוֹב, וְיִבְשֶׁר לָנוּ בְּשׂוּרוֹת טוֹבוֹת, יְשׁוּעוֹת וְנִחְמוֹת." "May the merciful one send us Elijah the Prophet, may he be remembered for good, and he will herald for us tidings of goodness, salvation, and comfort".

## Elijah in Jewish folklore

The volume of references to Elijah in folklore stands in marked contrast to that in the canon. Elijah's miraculous transferral to heaven lead to speculation as to his true identity. Louis Ginzberg equates him with Phinehas the grandson of Aaron<sup>[40]</sup> (Exodus 6:25<sup>[41]</sup>). Because of Phinehas zealotry for God, he and his descendants were promised, "a covenant of lasting priesthood" (Numbers 25:13<sup>[42]</sup>). Therefore, Elijah is a priest as well as a prophet. Elijah is also equated with the Archangel Sandalphon,<sup>[43]</sup> whose four wing beats will carry him to any part of the earth. When forced to choose between death and dishonor, Rabbi Kahana chose to leap to his death. Before he could strike the ground, Elijah/Sandalphon had appeared to catch him.<sup>[44]</sup> Yet another name for Elijah is "Angel of the Covenant"<sup>[45]</sup>

## Rabbi Joshua ben Levi

References to Elijah in Jewish folklore range from short observations (e. g. It is said that when dogs are happy for no reason, it is because Elijah is in the neighborhood)<sup>[46]</sup> to lengthy parables on the nature of God's justice.

One such story is that of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. The rabbi, a friend of Elijah's, was asked what favor he might wish. The rabbi answered only that he be able to join Elijah in his wanderings. Elijah granted his wish only if he refrained from asking any questions about any of the prophet's actions. He agreed and they began their journey. The first place they came to was the house of an elderly couple who were so poor they had only one old cow. The old couple gave of their hospitality as best they could. The next morning, as the travelers left, Elijah prayed that the old cow would die and it did. The second place they came to was the home of a wealthy man. He had no patience for his visitors and chased them away with the admonition that they should get jobs and not beg from honest people. As they were leaving, they passed the man's wall and saw that it was crumbling. Elijah prayed that the wall be repaired and it was so. Next, they came to a wealthy synagogue. They were allowed to spend the night with only the smallest of provisions. When they left, Elijah prayed that every member of the synagogue might become a leader.

Finally, they came to a very poor synagogue. Here they were treated with great courtesy and hospitality. When they left, Elijah prayed that God might give them a single wise leader. At this Rabbi Joshua could no longer hold back. He demanded of Elijah an explanation of his actions. At the house of the old couple, Elijah knew that the Angel of Death was coming for the old woman. So he prayed that God might have the angel take the cow instead. At the house of the wealthy man, there was a great treasure hidden in the crumbling wall. Elijah prayed that the wall be restored thus keeping the treasure away from the miser. The story ends with a moral: A synagogue with many leaders will be ruined by many arguments. A town with a single wise leader will be guided to success and prosperity. "Know then, that if thou seest an evil-doer prosper, it is not always unto his advantage, and if a righteous man suffers

need and distress, think not God is unjust.”<sup>[47]</sup>

## Rabbi Eliezer

The Elijah of legend did not lose any of his ability to afflict the comfortable. The case of Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai is illustrative. Once, when walking a beach, he came upon a hideously ugly man—the prophet in disguise. The man greeted him courteously, “Peace be with thee, Rabbi.” Instead of returning the greeting, the rabbi could not resist an insult, “How ugly you are! Is there anyone as ugly as you in your town?” Elijah responded with, “I don’t know. Perhaps you should tell the Master Architect how ugly is this, His construction.” The rabbi realized his wrong and asked for pardon. But Elijah would not give it until the entire city had asked for forgiveness for the rabbi and the rabbi had promised to mend his ways.<sup>[48]</sup>

## Lilith

Elijah was always seen as deeply pious, it seems only natural that he would be pitted against an equally evil individual. This was found in the person of Lilith. Lilith in legend was the first wife of Adam. She rebelled against Adam, the angels, and even God. She came to be seen as a demon and a witch.<sup>[49][50]</sup>

Elijah encountered Lilith and instantly recognized and challenged her, “Unclean one, where are you going?” Unable to avoid or lie to the prophet, she admitted she was on her way to the house of a pregnant woman. Her intention was to kill the woman and eat the child.

Elijah pronounced his malediction, “I curse you in the Name of the Lord. Be silent as a stone!” But, Lilith was able to make a bargain with Elijah. She promises to “forsake my evil ways” if Elijah will remove his curse. To seal the bargain she gives Elijah her names so that they can be posted in the houses of pregnant women or new born children or used as amulets. Lilith promises, “where I see those names, I shall run away at once. Neither the child nor the mother will ever be injured by me.”<sup>[51]</sup>

## Elijah in Christianity

### References in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus would say for those who believed, John the Baptist was Elijah, who would come before the “great and terrible day” as predicted by Malachi.

Some English translations of the New Testament use Elias, a Latin form of the name. In the King James Version, “Elias” appears only in the texts translated from Greek.

### John the Baptist

John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and baptism. He predicted the day of judgment using imagery similar to that of Malachi. He also preached that the Messiah was coming. All of this was done in a style that immediately recalled the image of Elijah to his audience. He wore a coat of camel's hair secured with a leather girdle (Matthew 3:4 <sup>[52]</sup>, Mark 1:6 <sup>[53]</sup>). He also frequently preached in wilderness areas near the Jordan river.



A Northern Russian icon from ca. 1290 showing the ascent of Elijah toward heaven

In the Gospel of John, when John the Baptist was asked by a delegation of priests (present tense) “Art thou Elias”, he replied “I am not (John 1:21 <sup>[54]</sup>). The author of Matthew 11:14 <sup>[55]</sup> and Matthew 17:10–13 <sup>[56]</sup> however, makes it



clear that John was Elijah (or that he fulfilled the office of Elijah) but was not recognized as such. In the annunciation narrative in Luke, an angel appeared to Zechariah, John's father, and told him that John "will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God," and that he will go forth "in the spirit and power of Elijah". (Luke 1:16–17<sup>[57]</sup>)

### Jesus Christ

In the Gospel of Luke, Herod Antipas hears some of the stories surrounding Jesus Christ. Some tell Herod that John the Baptist, whom he had executed, has come back to life. Others tell him that it is Elijah.<sup>[58]</sup> Later in the same gospel, Jesus asks his disciples who the people say that he is. The apostles' answer includes Elijah among others.<sup>[59]</sup>

However Jesus' ministry had little in common with that of Elijah; in particular, he preached the forgiveness of one's enemies, while Elijah killed his. Miracle stories similar to those of Elijah were associated with Jesus (e. g. raising of the dead,<sup>[60]</sup> miraculous feeding).<sup>[61]</sup> Jesus implicitly separates himself from Elijah when he rebukes James and John for desiring to call down fire upon an unwelcoming Samaritan village in a similar manner to Elijah. Likewise, Jesus rebukes a potential follower who wanted first to return home to say farewell to his family, whereas Elijah permitted this of his replacement Elisha.

During Jesus' crucifixion, some of the onlookers wonder if Elijah will come to rescue him, as by the time of Jesus, Elijah had entered folklore as a rescuer of Jews in distress.



The upper part of the *Transfiguration* (1520) by Raphael, depicting Elijah, Jesus, and Moses (holding the Tablets of the Law).

### Transfiguration

Elijah makes an appearance in the New Testament during an incident known as the Transfiguration.<sup>[62]</sup>

At the summit of an unnamed mount, Jesus' face begins to shine. The disciples who are with Him hear the voice of God announce that Jesus is "My beloved Son." The disciples also see Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Jesus. Peter is so struck by the experience that he asks Jesus if they should build three "tabernacles": one for Elijah, one for Jesus and one for Moses.

There is agreement among some Christian theologians that Elijah appears as a witness of the prophets and Moses as a witness of the law for the divinely announced "Son of God."<sup>[63][64]</sup>

### Other references

Elijah is mentioned three more times in the New Testament: in Luke, Romans, and James. In Luke 4:24–27<sup>[65]</sup>, Jesus uses Elijah as an example of rejected prophets. Jesus says, "No prophet is accepted in his own country," and then mentions Elijah, saying that there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to one in Phoenicia. In Romans 11:1–6<sup>[66]</sup>, Paul cites Elijah as an example of God's never forsaking his people (the Israelites). In James 5:16–18<sup>[67]</sup>, James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and then cites Elijah's prayers which started and ended the famine in Israel as examples.

Ecclesiasticus


"At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob."

— A line in Ecclesiasticus describing Elijah's mission (Ecclesiasticus 48:10).

In the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (Sirach 48:10 <sup>[68]</sup>) his tasks are altered to: 1) herald the eschaton, 2) calm God's fury, 3) restore familial peace, and 4) restore the 12 tribes.

Prophet saint

Elijah (Elias)



Russian Icon of the Prophet Elijah (12th century, Pskov school. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).

Prophet	
Honored in	Judaism Christianity Islam Baha'i Faith
Feast	July 20
Attributes	prophet, wonder-worker



*Elijah reviving the Son of the Widow of Zarephath by Louis Hersent*

In Western Christianity, the Prophet Elijah is commemorated as a saint with a feast day on 20 July by the Roman Catholic Church<sup>[69]</sup> and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.<sup>[70]</sup> Catholics believe that he was unmarried, celibate.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church and those Eastern Catholic Churches which follow the Byzantine Rite, he is commemorated on the same date (in the 21st century, Julian Calendar 20 July corresponds to Gregorian Calendar 2 August). He is greatly revered among the Orthodox as a model of the contemplative life. He is also commemorated on the Orthodox liturgical calendar on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers (the Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord).

### Carmelite tradition

Elijah is revered as the spiritual Father and traditional founder of the Catholic religious Order of Carmelites. In addition to taking their name from Mt. Carmel where the first hermits of the order established themselves, the Calced Carmelite and Discalced Carmelite traditions pertaining to Elijah focus upon the prophet's withdrawal from public life.<sup>[71][72]</sup> The medieval Carmelite Book of the First Monks offers some insight into the heart of the Orders' contemplative vocation and reverence for the prophet.

### Liturgical commemorations

Since most Eastern Churches either use Greek as their liturgical language or translated their liturgies from the Greek, *Elias* (or its modern iotacized form *Ilias*) is the form of the prophet's name used among most members of the Eastern Orthodox Church and those Eastern Catholic Churches which follow the Byzantine Rite.

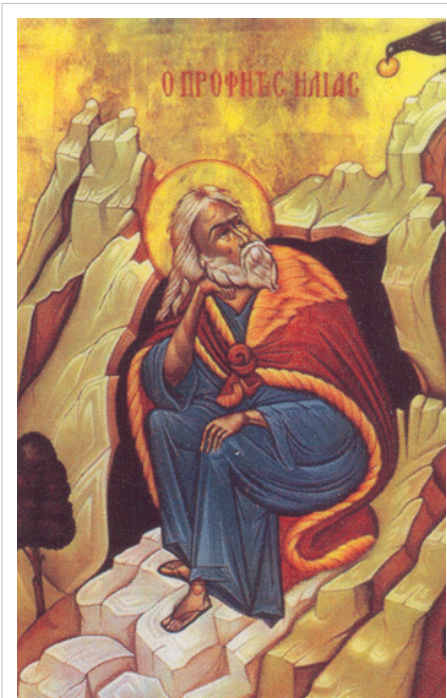
The feast day of saint Elias falls on July 20 of the Orthodox liturgical calendar (for those churches which follow the traditional Julian Calendar, July 20 currently falls on August 2 of the modern Gregorian Calendar). This day is a major holiday in Lebanon and is one of a handful of holidays there whose celebration is accompanied by a launching of fireworks by the general public. The full name of St. Elias in Lebanon translates to St. Elias the Living because it is believed that he did not die but rode his fiery chariot to heaven. The reference to the fiery chariot is likely why the Lebanese celebrate this holiday with fireworks.

Elias is also commemorated, together with all of the righteous persons of the Old Testament, on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers (the Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord).

The Apolytikion in the Fourth Tone for St. Elias:

The incarnate Angel, the Cornerstone of the Prophets, the second Forerunner of the Coming of Christ, the glorious Elias, who from above, sent down to Elisha the grace to dispel sickness and cleanse lepers, abounds therefore in healing for those who honor him.

The Kontakion in the Second Tone for St. Elias:



*Elias on Mount Horeb, Greek Orthodox icon.*

O Prophet and foreseer of the great works of God, O greatly renowned Elias, who by your word held back the clouds of rain, intercede for us to the only Loving One.

### Pagan associations and mountaintops

Starting in the fifth century, Elias is often connected with Helios, the Sun. The two words have very similar pronunciations in post-classical Greek; Elijah rode in his chariot of fire to heaven (2 Kings 2:11<sup>[73]</sup>) just as Helios drove the chariot of the sun across the sky; and the holocaust sacrifice offered by Elijah and burned by fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38<sup>[74]</sup>) corresponds to the sun warming the earth.<sup>[75]</sup>

Sedulius writes poetically in the fifth century that the "bright path to glittering heaven" suits Elias both "in merits and name", as changing one letter makes his name "Helios"; but he does not identify the two.<sup>[76]</sup> A homily entitled *De ascensione Heliae*, misattributed to Chrysostom, claims that poets and painters use the ascension of Elijah as a model for their depictions of the sun, and says that "Elijah is really Helios". Saint Patrick appears to conflate Helios and Elias.<sup>[77]</sup> In modern times, much Greek folklore also connects Elias with the sun.<sup>[78]</sup>

In Greece, chapels and monasteries dedicated to Prophet Elias (Προφήτης Ηλίας) are often found on mountaintops, which themselves are often named after him. Since Wachsmuth (1864),<sup>[79]</sup> the usual explanation for this has been that Elias was identified with Helios, who had mountaintop shrines. But few shrines of Helios were on mountaintops, and sun-worship was subsumed by Apollo-worship by Christian times, and so could not be confused with Elias.<sup>[80]</sup> The modern folklore is not good evidence for the *origin* of the association of the sun, Elias, and mountaintops. Perhaps Elias is simply a "natural patron of high places".<sup>[81]</sup>

The association of Elias with mountaintops seems to come from a different pagan tradition: Elias took on the attributes and the locales associated with Zeus, especially his associations with mountains and his powers over rain, thunder, lighting, and wind. When Elias prevailed over the priests of Baal, it was on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38<sup>[74]</sup>), which later became known as Mount St. Elias. When he spend forty days in a cave, it was on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8<sup>[82]</sup>). When Elias confronts Ahab, he stops the rains for three years (1 Kings 17:1-18:1<sup>[83]</sup>).<sup>¶</sup>

A map of mountain-cults of Zeus shows that most of these sites are now dedicated to Elias, including Mount Olympus, Mount Lykaion, Mount Arachnaion, and Mount Taleton on the mainland, and Mount Kenaion, Mount Oche, and Mount Kynados in the islands. Of these, the only one with a recorded tradition of a Helios cult is Mount Taleton.

Elias is associated with pre-Christian lightning gods in many other European traditions.

Among Albanians pilgrimages are made to mountaintops to ask for rain during the summer. One such tradition that is gaining popularity is the 2 August pilgrimage to Ljuboten on the Sharr mountains. Muslims refer to this day as Aligjyn (Ali Day), and it is even believed that Ali becomes Elias at midday.

As Elijah was described as ascending into heaven in a fiery chariot, the Christian missionaries who converted Slavic tribes likely found him an ideal analogy for Perun, the supreme Slavic god of storms, thunder and lightning bolts. In many Slavic countries Elijah is known as Elijah the Thunderer (Ilija Gromovnik), who drives the heavens in a chariot and administers rain and snow, thus actually taking the place of Perun in popular beliefs.<sup>[84][85][86]</sup> Perun is also sometimes conflated with the legendary hero Elijah of Murom.<sup>[87][88]</sup> The feast of St. Elias is known as *Ilinden* in South Slavic, and was chosen as the day of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising in 1903; it is now the holiday of Republic Day in the Republic of Macedonia.

In Estonian folklore Elijah is considered to be the successor of Ukko, the lightning spirit.<sup>[89]</sup>

In Georgian mythology, he replaces Elwa. A Georgian story about Elijah:

Once Jesus, the prophet Elijah, and St. George were going through Georgia. When they became tired and hungry they stopped to dine. They saw a Georgian shepherd and decided to ask him to feed them. First, Elijah went up to the shepherd and asked him for a sheep. After the shepherd asked his identity Elijah said that, he was the one who sent him rain to get him a good profit from farming. The shepherd became angry at him and told him that he was the one who also sent thunderstorms, which destroyed the farms of poor widows. (After Elijah, Jesus and St. George attempt to get help and eventually succeed).<sup>[90]</sup>

Elias has other pagan associations: a modern legend about Elias mirrors precisely the legend of Odysseus seeking a place where the locals would not recognize an oar—hence the mountaintops.<sup>[91]</sup>

## Elijah and Elias in the LDS Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) acknowledges Elijah as a prophet. The LDS Church teaches that the Malachi prophecy of the return of Elijah was fulfilled on April 3, 1836, when Elijah visited the prophet and founder of the church, Joseph Smith, Jr., along with Oliver Cowdery, in the Kirtland Temple as a resurrected being. This event is chronicled in Doctrine and Covenants 110:13-16<sup>[92]</sup>. This experience forms the basis for the church's focus on genealogy and family history and belief in the eternal nature of marriage and families.

In Latter-day Saint theology, the name-title Elias is not always synonymous with Elijah and is often used for people other than the biblical prophet. According to Joseph Smith,

The spirit of Elias is first, Elijah second, and Messiah last. Elias is a forerunner to prepare the way, and the spirit and power of Elijah is to come after, holding the keys of power, building the Temple to the capstone, placing the seals of the Melchizedek Priesthood upon the house of Israel, and making all things ready; then Messiah comes to His Temple, which is last of all.<sup>[93]</sup>

People to whom the title Elias is applied in Mormonism include Noah, the angel Gabriel (considered to be the same person as Noah), Elijah, John the Baptist, John the Apostle, and an unspecified man who was a contemporary of Abraham.

Detractors of Mormonism have often alleged that Smith, in whose time and place the King James Version was the only available English translation of the bible, simply failed to grasp the fact that the Elijah of the Old Testament and the Elias of the New are one and the same person. Latter-day Saints deny this and say that the difference they make between the two is deliberate and prophetic. The names Elias and Elijah refer to one who prepares the way for the



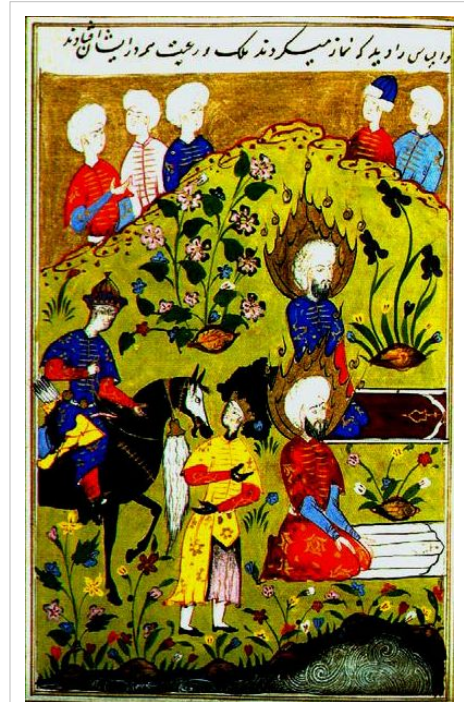
This common depiction of the prophet Elijah riding a flaming chariot across the sky resulted in syncretistic folklore among the Slavs incorporating pre-Christian motifs in the beliefs and rites regarding him in Slavic culture.



coming of the Lord. This is applicable to John the Baptist coming to prepare the way for the Lord and His baptism; it also refers to Elijah appearing during the transfiguration to prepare for Jesus by restoring keys of sealing power. Jesus then gave this power to the Twelve saying, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

## Elijah in Islam

**Elijah** (Arabic: إلیاس; *Ilyas*) is also mentioned as a prophet in the Qur'an.<sup>[94]</sup> Elijah's narrative in the Qur'an and later Muslim tradition resembles closely that in the Hebrew Bible and Muslim literature records Elijah's primary prophesying as taking place during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel as well as Ahaziah.<sup>[95]</sup> He is seen by Muslims to be the prophetic predecessor to Elisha. While neither the Bible nor the Qur'an mentions the genealogy of Elijah, some scholars of Islam believe he may have come from the priestly family of the prophet Aaron.<sup>[96]</sup> Elijah in Muslim theology is very rarely associated with the events of the eschaton, as he is in Jewish tradition, and Islam generally views Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>[97]</sup> Elijah's figure has, however, been identified with a number of other prophets and saints, including Idris, which is believed by some scholars to have been another name for Elijah,<sup>[98]</sup> and Khidr.<sup>[99]</sup> Islamic legend later developed the figure of Elijah, greatly embellishing upon his attributes, and some apocryphal literature gave Elijah the status of a half-human, half-angel.<sup>[100]</sup> Elijah also appears in later works of literature, including the *Hamzanama*.<sup>[101]</sup>



*Khizr and Elijah Praying in Mecca; Persian miniature from an illuminated manuscript of Stories of the Prophets (c. 427 A.H.)*

## Qur'an

Elijah is mentioned in the Qur'an, where his preaching is recounted in a concise manner. The Qur'an narrates that Elijah told his people to come to the worship of God and to leave the worship of Baal, the primary idol of the area. The Qur'an states:

Verily Elijah was one of the apostles. When he said to his people: "Will you not fear God? "Will ye call upon Ba'al and leave the Best of Creators, God, your LORD and Cherisher and the LORD and Cherisher of your fathers of old?"

—Qur'an, chapter 37 (As-Saaffat), verse 123–126

The Qur'an makes it clear that the majority of Elijah's people denied the prophet and continued to follow idolatry. However, it mentions that a small number of devoted servants of God among them followed Elijah and believed in and worshiped the LORD. The Qur'an states:

They denied him (Elijah), and will surely be brought to punishment, Except the sincere and devoted Servants of God (among them). And We left his (memory) for posterity.

—Qur'an, chapter 37 (As-Saaffat), verse 127–128

In the Qur'an, God praises Elijah in two places:

Peace be upon Elijah! This is how We reward those who do good. He is truly among our believing servants.

—Qur'an, chapter 37 (As-Saaffat), verse 129–132

And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elijah, they were all from among the righteous

—Qur'an, chapter 6 (Al-An'am), verse 85

Numerous commentators, including Abdullah Yusuf Ali, have offered commentary on VI: 85<sup>[102]</sup> saying that Elijah, Zechariah, John the Baptist and Jesus were all spiritually connected. Abdullah Yusuf Ali says:



*Prophet Elijah Rescuing Nur ad-Dahr from the Sea, a scene from the Hamzanama, here imagined in a Persian miniature by Mir Sayyid Ali (c. 1550 C.E.)*

The third group consists not of men of action, but Preachers of Truth, who led solitary lives. Their epithet is: "the Righteous." They form a connected group round Jesus. Zachariah was the father of John the Baptist, who is referenced as "Elias, which was for to come" (Matt 11:14); and Elias is said to have been present and talked to Jesus at the Transfiguration on the Mount (Matt. 17:3).

## Literature and tradition

Muslim literature and tradition recounts that Elijah preached to the Kingdom of Israel, ruled over by Ahab and later his son Ahaziah. He is believed to have been a "prophet of the desert—like John the Baptist".<sup>[103]</sup> Elijah is believed to have preached with zeal to Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who according to Muslim tradition was partly responsible for the worship of false idols in this area. Muslims believe that it was because the majority of people refused to listen to Elijah that Elisha had to continue preaching the message of God to Israel after him.<sup>[104]</sup>

Elijah has been the subject of legends and folktales in Muslim culture, usually involving his meeting with Khidr, and in one legend, with Muhammad himself.<sup>[105]</sup> Most such legends, however, are regarded as folktales rather than actual events. In Islamic mysticism, however, Elijah is associated closely with the sage Khidr. One legend reported that Elijah and Khidr met together every year in Jerusalem to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>[106]</sup> Elijah appears also in the *Hamzanama* numerous times, where he is spoken of as being the brother of Khidr as well as one who drunk from the Fountain of Youth.<sup>[107]</sup>

Although most Muslim scholars believed that Elijah preached in Israel, some early commentators on the Qur'an stated that Elijah was sent to Baalbek, in Lebanon.<sup>[108]</sup> Modern scholars have rejected this claim, stating that the connection of the city with Elijah would have been made because of the first half of the city's name, that of *Baal*, which was the deity that Elijah exhorted his people to stop worshiping. Scholars who reject identification of Elijah's town with Baalbek further argue that the town of Baalbek is not mentioned with the narrative of Elijah in either the Qur'an or the Hebrew Bible.<sup>[109]</sup>



## Elijah in other faiths

### In Bahá'í

In the Bahá'í Faith, the Báb, founder of The Bábí Faith, is believed to be the return of Elijah and John the Baptist. Both Elijah and John the Baptist are considered to be Lesser Prophets, whose stations are below that of a Manifestation of God such as Jesus Christ, Buddha, Muhammad, the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb is buried on Mount Carmel, where Elijah had his confrontation with the prophets of Baal.

## Controversies

### Miracle of the ravens



*Elijah fed by the ravens*, by Giovanni Lanfranco,  
Musée des beaux-arts de Marseille

That *ravens* fed Elijah by the brook Cherith has been questioned. The Hebrew text at 1 Kings 17:4–6<sup>[110]</sup> uses the word עֲרֵבִים *ōrvīm*, which means *ravens*, but with a different vocalization might equally mean *Arabs*. The Septuagint has κορακες, *ravens*, and other traditional translations followed.

Alternatives have been proposed for many years; for example Adam Clarke treats it as a discussion already of long standing.<sup>[111]</sup> Objections to the traditional translation are that ravens are ritually unclean (see Leviticus 11:13–17<sup>[112]</sup>) as well as physically dirty; it is difficult to imagine any method of delivery of the food which is not disgusting. The parallelism with the incident that follows, where Elijah is fed by the widow, also suggests a human, if mildly improbable, agent.

Prof. John Gray chooses *Arabs*, saying "We adopt this reading solely because of its congruity with the sequel, where Elijah is fed by an alien Phoenician woman."<sup>[113]</sup> His translation of the verses in question is:

And the word of Jehovah came to Elijah saying, Go hence and turn eastward and hide thyself in the Wadi Kerith east of the Jordan, and it shall be that thou shalt drink of the wadi, and I have commanded the Arabs to feed thee there. And he went and did according to the word of Jehovah and went and dwelt in the Wadi Kerith east of the Jordan. And the Arabs brought him bread in the morning and flesh in the evening and he would drink of the wadi.

### Ascension into the heavens

In the Gospel of John Jesus said: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, [even] the Son of man which is in heaven." (John 3:13)

Traditionally Christianity interprets the "Son of Man" as a title of Jesus, but this has never been an article of faith and there are other interpretations. Further interpreting this quote, some Christians believe that Elijah was not assumed into heaven but simply transferred to another assignment either in heaven or with King Jehoram of Judah. The prophets reacted in such a way that makes sense if he was carried away, and not simply straight up (2Kings 2:16<sup>[114]</sup>).

The question of whether Elijah was in heaven or elsewhere on earth depends partly on the view of the letter Jehoram received from Elijah in 2 Chron 21 after Elijah had ascended. Some have suggested that the letter was written before Elijah ascended, but only delivered later.<sup>[115]</sup> The rabbinical Seder Olam explains that the letter was delivered seven years after his ascension.<sup>[116]</sup> This is also a possible explanation for some variation in manuscripts of Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews when dealing with the contradiction between the ascension and the letter to Jehoram.<sup>[117]</sup>

Others have argued that Elijah was only "caught away" such as Philip in Acts 8:39<sup>[118]</sup> John Lightfoot reasoned that it must have been a different Elijah.<sup>[119]</sup>

Elijah's name typically occurs in Jewish lists of those who have entered heaven alive.

## Return

Centuries after his departure the Jewish nation awaits the coming of Elijah to precede the coming of the Messiah. For many Christians this prophecy was fulfilled in the gospels, where he appears during the Transfiguration alongside Moses (Matthew 17:9–13<sup>[120]</sup>). Commentators have said that Moses' appearance represented the law, while Elijah's appearance represented the prophets.<sup>[121]</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that Elijah returned on April 3, 1836 in an appearance to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, fulfilling the prophecy in Malachi.

The Bahá'í Faith believes Elijah returned as the biblical prophet John the Baptist and as the Báb who founded the Bábí Faith in 1844.

## Elijah in arts and literature

- Perhaps the best-known representation of the story of Elijah is Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio "Elijah". The oratorio chronicles many episodes of Elijah's life, including his challenge to Ahab and the contest of the gods, the miracle of raising the dead, and his ascension into heaven. Composed and premiered in 1846, the oratorio was criticized by members of the New German School but nonetheless remains one of the most popular Romantic choral-orchestral works in the repertoire.
- In *Orlando Furioso*, the English knight Astolfo flies up to the moon in Elijah's flaming chariot.
- Elijah Rock is a traditional Christian spiritual about Elijah, also sometimes used by Jewish youth groups.
- "Go Like Elijah" is a song by the American rock-pop-jazz songwriter Chi Coltrane.
- Lorenzetto created a statue of Elijah with assistance of the young sculptor Raffaello da Montelupo, using designs by Raphael.
- *The Fifth Mountain* by Paulo Coelho is based on the story of Elijah
- Christian metal band Disciple released the song "God of Elijah" on their 2001 album *By God*. The theme of the song is the challenge Elijah placed against Ahab between Baal and the god of Israel.
- The roots-fusion band Seatrain records, on the albums of the same name (1970), bandmember Peter Rowans song *Waiting for Elijah*, alluding to Elijah's second coming, see Old Testament references above.
- From 1974 to 1976 Philip K. Dick believed himself to be possessed by the spirit of Elijah.<sup>[122]</sup> He later included Elijah (as Elias Tate) in his novel *The Divine Invasion*.
- On Ryan Adams' 2005 album *29 (album)* the song "Voices" speaks of Elijah, alluding to Elijah being the prophet of destruction.
- In 1996, Robin Mark created a praise song entitled *Days of Elijah*.
- Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* (2006) features an old man who ambiguously refers to himself as Ely.
- Elijah ("Lije") is the name of the protagonist in three novels of Isaac Asimov's *Robot* series. He is familiar with biblical stories and sometimes relates them in the narrative or in discussion with his robot partner who was built on a world devoid of religion. His wife is ironically named Jezebel.
- The popular movie *Chariots of Fire* alludes to the William Blake poem *And did those feet in ancient time*, which in turn alludes to the Elijah story.
- Elijah was played by John Hoyt in the 1953 film *Sins of Jezebel*.
- A series of paintings by Clive Hicks-Jenkins around 2003-7 depicted Elijah being fed by a raven, inspired by fragments of a Tuscan altarpiece in Christ Church Picture Gallery in Oxford.<sup>[123]</sup>
- Referenced in the song "It Was Written," by Damian Marley, featuring Capleton and Drag-On.

- Referenced in the movie *The Book of Eli*, starring Denzel Washington in the title role as the man on a mission in a post-apocalyptic world to deliver the Bible for safe-keeping.
- I. L. Peretz wrote *The Magician*, which was illustrated by Marc Chagall in 1917, about Elijah.

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who took part in, controlled, and guided all the affairs of his people. Both Ahab and Azariah were prone to lapse into the worship of Baal, the sun-god worshipped in Syria. That worship also included the worship of nature-powers and procreative powers, as in the Hindu worship of the Lingam, and led to many abuses. King Ahab had married a princess of Sidon, Jezebel, a wicked woman who led her husband to forsake Allah and adopt Baal-worship. "Elijah denounced all Ahab's sins as well as the sins of Ahaziah and had to flee for his life. Eventually, according to the Old Testament (4 Kings, 2:11) he was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven in a chariot of fire after he had left his mantle with Elisha the prophet."

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