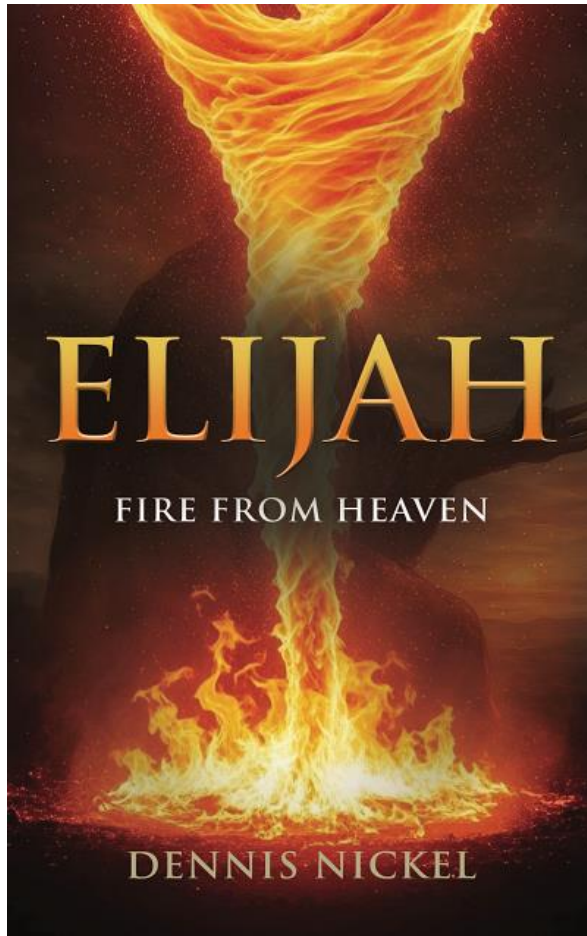
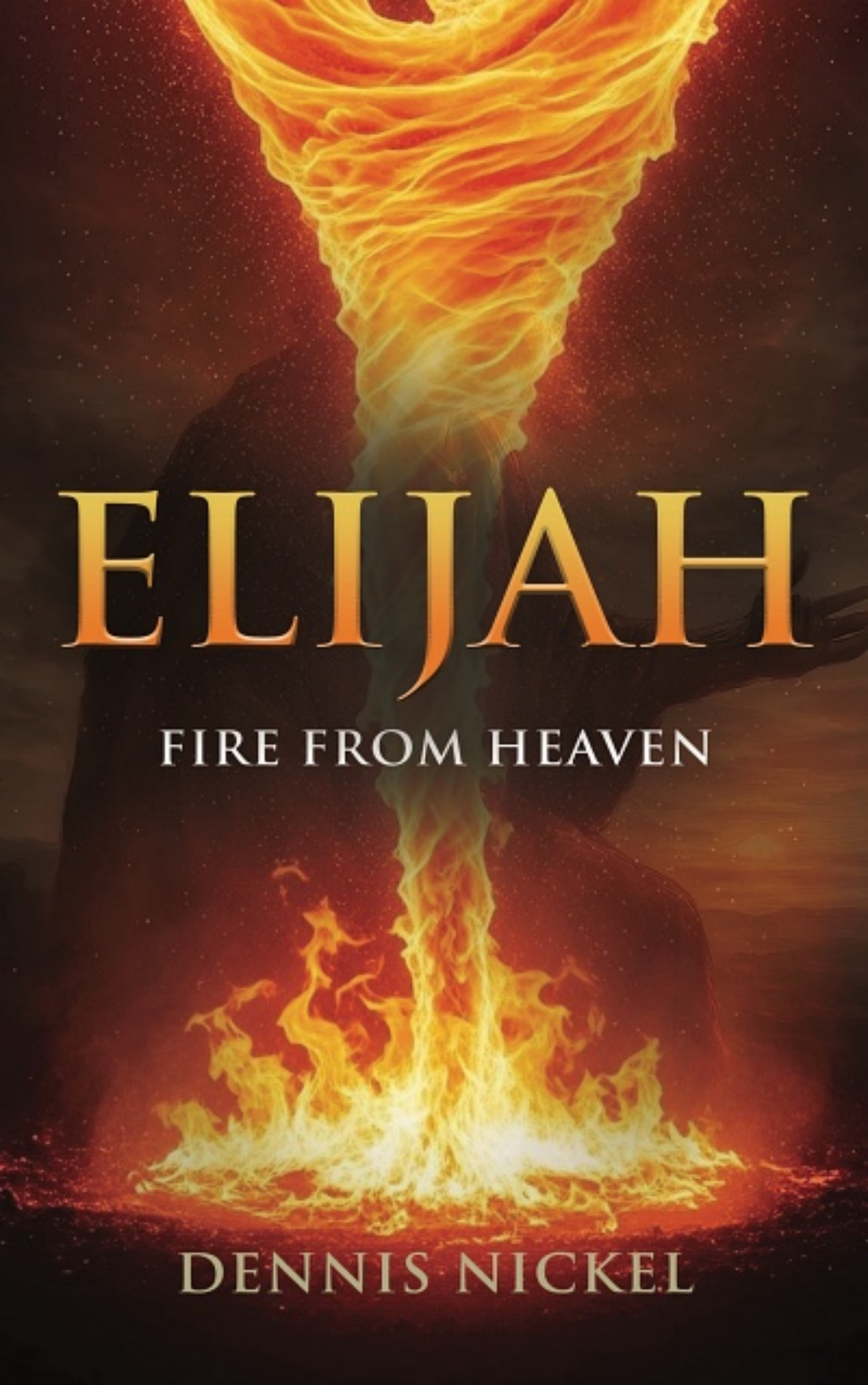




Time after time, Elijah was faced with the decision to either be obedient to God, or surrender to human desires. Every time, he chose to remain faithful.

Elijah: Fire from Heaven
By Dennis Nickel

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ELIJAH

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

DENNIS NICKEL

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Chapter 4

ELIJAH'S ON THE JOB TRAINING

1 Kings 17:17–24

Elijah is a recent graduate from Dry Brook University. There, he learned to depend upon the Lord for all his provisions and not upon himself. It was there, by the brook Cherith, in the wilderness, that Elijah had his flesh broken. As soon as that trial of faith was over, Elijah found himself enrolled in Empty Barrel Graduate School. While there, he has his pride broken as he must trust the Lord to provide for a widow, who in turn provides for the prophet. It seems that Elijah's life is defined by one trial after another. Someone who did not know any better might start to think that Elijah is being punished for something.

Of course, the Bible teaches us a different truth. God isn't correcting His prophet; He is perfecting Him. God is teaching Elijah lessons that can be learned in no other fashion than through trial and difficulty. You see, it is in the storms of life that we learn God can walk on the waves. It is in the valleys of life that we learn that He is the Lily of the Valleys. Sometimes we must go through the fires of life to find out that He will go with us every step of the way. These are the things Elijah is learning, and they will serve him well in the very near future. God is preparing Elijah to stand for Him in a very powerful way.

In this chapter, the prophet faces another difficult trial of faith. In a sense, Elijah is getting some on-the-job training from the Lord. Let's look into this poignant scene of tragedy and victory and learn, along with Elijah, the valuable lessons of on the job training.

ELIJAH'S TEST

This boy, who had been so miraculously fed by divine providence, is suddenly cut off and dies. It must have seemed like a great contradiction to the widow and to the prophet.

I will remind you that God's way does not always make sense from a human perspective. Yet, even when the Lord's ways don't make sense, you can trust Him. When He does what we think is contradictory and unusual, it is merely to open the door for Him to reveal Himself in a new and powerful way. Therefore, regardless of the problem or the trial, simply learn to walk with your eyes on the Lord. Trust Him, and He will take care of every situation.

Evidently, this is the only son this poor widow woman had. Certainly, she had pinned all of her hopes for the future on him. No doubt she was looking to the day when he would arrive at manhood and would provide for her upkeep. She probably expected to be with her son for many years to come. However, now her dreams are shattered, and she is devastated and grief-stricken. Her heart is broken, and her world is shattered. You see, she knew the drought was coming, but she did not know death was coming. She was prepared for one; the other caught her totally off guard! She is placing blame everywhere. She blames Elijah for bringing the judgment of God into her home. She is even blaming her past sins for the trouble she is having.

Friend, have you ever been in that place in your life? Have you ever watched everything you worked for, everything you loved, everything you lived for crumble around you? Do you remember how that appeared? That is a difficult place to be! Yet there are times when the Lord will allow His children to pass through such fires. Do you get the idea? Why? He does it so we can learn to trust Him, not external resources. He does it so that we may learn to rely on Him more perfectly. He does it so that

we might experience His grace in a new, fresh manner. He does it so that we might be brought to a place of utter dependence! When the Lord has brought you low, learn early to look to Him. It will help lift you out of your situation faster. You can catch a wild buzzard and put him in an open pen that's, let's say, six-by-six, and he will die there. He cannot file away. Why? A buzzard needs at least a twelve-foot runway to take off! Take a bat, place it on the ground, and he will flop around there until he dies. Why? He can only achieve flight from an elevated position. He must launch out into the air. Take a bumblebee and put it in a tumbler, leave the top open, and that bee will never find its way out. He is so interested in trying to fly through the glass in front of him that he will never think to look up and find the way out. What is the point? All three of these, the buzzard, the bee, and the bat, all fail to notice the freedom that is right above them. As a result, they remain trapped in their prison.

You see, the widow thought she was passing through a storm of correction. She thought God was hurting her. What she failed to see was that she was in a storm of perfection. God was, in fact, helping her! We're that way too, aren't we? We miss the help God is trying to give us while we focus on the hurt we feel in our hearts. The answer to life's storms is found in looking up to Jesus early and always.

What an impact this must have had on Elijah! I mean, he has trusted God to feed him with ravens. He has trusted God to give him water from a brook. When the brook dried up, Elijah followed God's call to Zarephath. There, he had submitted to the humiliating thought of being fed by a widow. He had trusted God, and miracles had resulted. He had seen God do the impossible. He had even watched as God worked in the heart of a pagan woman and brought her to faith. He had watched the Lord feed her and her family through a time of terrible drought. Now, this woman's son is dead, and she points her finger of

accusation at him. It must have been a very discouraging day for the man of God!

Folks, we are never more vulnerable to the attacks of the flesh and the devil than we are when we are discouraged. When we have tried to cross all our T's and dot each of our I's, and things still fall to pieces, it is easy to get defeated and discouraged. When that happens, we begin to wonder why. We begin to question God. We begin to lose faith and hope, and we become discouraged. When that happens, we are easily defeated. Now, I don't know what kind of valley you are trudging through, but I know the God of the valleys. When we start to become disillusioned and discouraged, we need to run to Him and find the help we need. If we do not, then we will be just another casualty on the battlefield of faith. Discouragement is a tremendous tool in the hand of the devil!

W. A. Criswell was perhaps the best-known pastor in the world during his long tenure at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. His sermons, personal efforts, and multiplied books have been the means of winning untold numbers to Christ.

But in Criswell's biography, author Billy Keith tells an interesting story about the man who led Criswell to the Lord. It was when W. A. was ten years old, and Reverend John Hicks came to his small Texas town to conduct a revival meeting. Hicks stayed in the Criswell home during his two-week campaign. Young W. A. was greatly taken with John Hicks, and one day he asked permission to leave school to attend the ten o'clock services at the church. Entering the chapel, he sat directly behind his mother and drank in every word that Hicks spoke. When Hicks gave the invitation, the lad went forward, and, with tears, took Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Years later, when Criswell was a world-renowned pastor, he told of his conversion to a friend, Wallace Basset. “Would you repeat that, W. A.?” Basset asked. W.A. repeated the story.

“I just can’t imagine that,” Basset said. “Johnny Hicks was a dear friend of mine, and he was here in Baylor Hospital in his last illness, from which he died. I often went to see Johnny, and one day as I sat beside him, he said, ‘Wallace, my life is over, my preaching days are done, and I’ve never done anything for Jesus. I’ve failed, Wallace, I’ve failed.’” Those were the last words the old preacher ever spoke. He didn’t realize how successful he had been in that one conversion.

The lesson? Never discount what the Lord is doing in you, through you, to you, and around you. He has a plan, and if you are part of it, all will be well in the end! Therefore, fight discouragement as if you were fighting for your life, for in a sense you are!

ELIJAH’S TRUST

Up until this point, Elijah hasn’t had to do much. He moved when God said move. He stayed when God said to stay. He ate when God provided. All Elijah has done is basically watch God do the impossible time and time again. However, he is placed in a position where he must get personally involved in what the Lord is doing. He is brought to a place where he must trust God for that which has never happened before!

Even as he confronts death and baseless accusations, Elijah is the picture of calm. He doesn’t get upset and attack back. He doesn’t lash out at the widow. He doesn’t even defend himself. He merely asks the widow to give her son to him. Then he takes the boy to his room and places him on his bed.

What a lesson this is for you and me! How often do the storms of life begin to blow in on us, and we react to them very badly?

Something unexpected will happen, and instead of taking it to the Lord as Elijah did, we take it into our own hands and fall apart. We worry. We fret. We wonder why. Someone attacks us, and instead of taking it to the Lord, we get upset and attack back. God helps us to learn the lesson that, in the midst of trials and trouble, we do not do better than to bring them to the Lord and leave them with Him. We cannot handle them, but He already has. May the Lord help us to remember that He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. Let us learn to calmly take our burdens to the Lord. He never gets excited. Why should we? He never loses sleep; why should we? By the way, when the widow gives her son to the prophet, she provides tangible evidence of her faith in God to do the impossible.

Elijah's heart has been touched by the pain this widow is experiencing. He has watched her grow in her faith. He has experienced her generosity. He has enjoyed her hospitality, and his heart is moved at her need. His compassion for this widow and her son is seen in three ways.

He petitions the Lord on behalf of the widow. In doing so, the prophet reveals the heart of one who knows God and cares for others. In fact, he is seen actually fulfilling the law of Christ. He is bearing the widow's burden in the presence of God.

He humbled himself and stretched his own body on top of the body of this dead child. Elijah knew the law, and he must have known that touching a dead body would defile him. The point here is that Elijah was willing to humiliate and humble himself to communicate with to another. He was willing to suffer loss that they might gain. That is the heart of ministry! Elijah has learned to feel the need of others. That is the essence of Christ like service.

At this point, Elijah asks God to do something that had never been done before! There is absolutely no record of any dead person ever being brought back to life before this day. This is an amazing prayer that Elijah prays! Elijah places everything on the line for the glory of God and for the needs of this one woman. He trusts God for the unseen. His heart is moved for her, and he trusts the Lord to do something about it!

For us, we must remember that during this time, Elijah's world has been turned upside down. However, he seems to be taking no thought for himself. He seems to be occupied with the needs of this poor widow. I just want to remind you that one of the surest and quickest ways to get your needs met is to stop worrying about your own needs and find someone who has a need or a burden and get under that burden with them. As we do that, we are committing ourselves unto the Lord and saying, "Father, I rely on you to take care of me, now use me to help this other person." That kind of faith honors God, and He will bless the life that is moved for others.

God honored the prophet's faith and raised the child from the dead. Why? Because Elijah trusted God by faith! Friend, a faith that honors God is a faith that is honored by God!

The story is told of a small town with no liquor stores. Eventually, however, a nightclub was built right on Main Street. Members of one of the churches in the area were so disturbed that they conducted several all-night prayer meetings and asked the Lord to burn down that den of iniquity. Lightning struck the tavern a short time later, and it was completely destroyed by fire. The owner, knowing how the church people had prayed, sued them for the damages. His attorney claimed that their prayers had caused the loss. The congregation, on the other hand, hired a lawyer and fought the charges. After much deliberation, the judge declared, "It's the opinion of this court

that wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern keeper is the one who really believes in prayer while the church members do not!”

When Elijah carried that child up those steps, all he had in his arms was a dead body. When he came back down, he had a living miracle. Visualize the joy that must have filled that house when God worked this miracle for Elijah and the widow. What a glad day that must have been when God eliminated the problem by His power!

Remember, we are talking about the strength of faith in God to work in times of struggle! It was faith that moved this impossible mountain, and it is faith that will move the mountain you are facing today as well. My friends, you can count on the Lord to look after you! Illustration: Years ago, the captain of a large vessel set sail with his family from Liverpool. His destination was New York. One night when everyone was asleep, an abrupt squall arose. The wind came rushing over the water, struck the vessel, and almost capsized it. Everything movable was sent tumbling and crashing, and the passengers realized they were in imminent peril. Everyone was alarmed, and many sprang from their berths and began to dress. The captain’s little daughter, just eight years old, was awakened and cried with fright, “What’s the matter?” When they told her about the storm, she asked, “Is Father on deck?” Assured that he was, the little one dropped back onto her pillow without fear. In spite of the roaring winds and crashing waves, she was soon fast asleep. Never fear, child of God, your Father is always on deck!

ELIJAH’S TESTIMONY

The widow expresses her firm confidence that Elijah is who he claimed to be. Apparently, Elijah and the widow needed this little bit of encouragement.

The widow also expresses her confidence in the Word of God. When she sees the outworking of faith through Elijah, she understands that God possesses all power in Heaven and earth and that He will perform His Word.

That is the basis of faith. If God has given His word in a matter, then you can rest assured that He will see to it that His Word is kept to the letter. That which God has promised His people is a reality, even though it may not yet be seen.

Why could Elijah pray for a resurrection when none had ever happened? Because of God's promise to sustain the little band until the drought ended. That boy was supposed to be alive when the first rains fell on the land! Elijah prevailed in prayer because He believed God's word!

Certainly, allowing a child to die and be resurrected from the dead would not have entered the minds of most people. It is probably not how we would have chosen to mold our man. However, I will remind you that His ways are not our ways! In the end, God's plan was accomplished.

The widow is now strengthened and grounded in her faith. She can believe God for anything! That is the place God wants to bring us to! He wants us to cast aside our doubts and cling to His Word. When God moves in power, it has a way of encouraging the troubled heart.

Elijah is now ready for the battles ahead. God has put him through school and placed him in several impossible situations. Each time, God has proven Himself to be greater than the problem. Elijah has learned the lesson that he can trust God for anything. He has arrived at the place where he is ready to be used by the Lord.

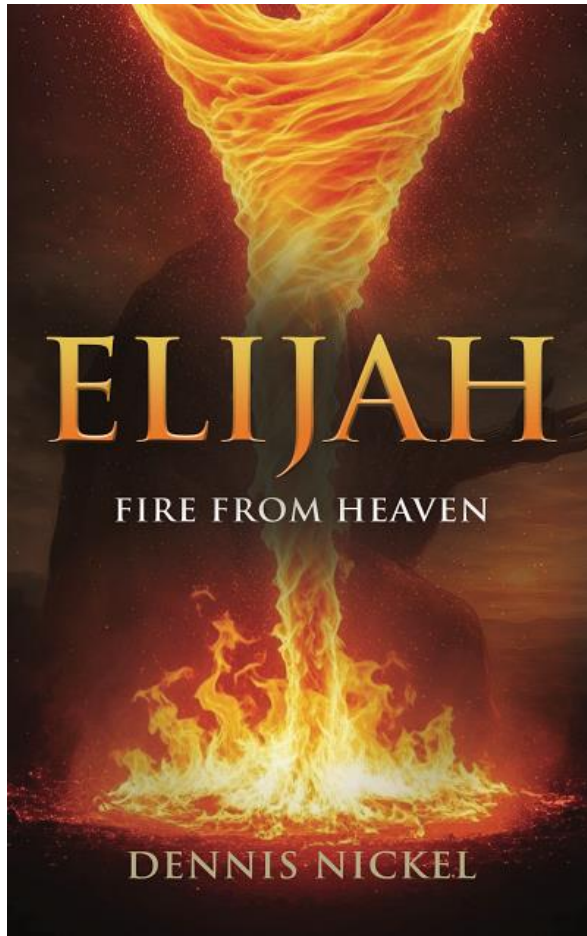
God's method for growing us isn't always pleasant or fun. However, it is essential that we go through the growing process

so that we can be better used of the Lord. As God takes us through the battles, and we see Him win them all by His power, we are enabled by faith to trust Him for even greater victories.

Friend, where are you today? Are you facing situations that seem impossible to you? Has it dawned on you that you aren't there by accident? Haven't things just worked out that way in your life? Have you come to realize that, if you are saved, nothing can happen to you that isn't first approved by God? If we can ever understand that, then we have taken the first step toward victory over the situation!

Whatever it is that you are facing today, I challenge you to bring it before the Lord and trust Him to see you over it, around it, or through it. Just like the widow placed the burden of her dead son in the arms of Elijah, I challenge you to place your burden this morning into the outstretched arms of Jesus. He will help you, but only when you trust Him by faith (1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 11:28).

If your problem is sin, Jesus can move that mountain. If it is emotional, financial, interpersonal, physical, spiritual, or anything else you can name, the answer lies in bringing it to Jesus. Will you come to the place where you can trust Him for your situation today?



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