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Title: Beach Reads Elijah: Just Like Us

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Scripture: [1 Kings 16:29-34](#)

Text: [1 Kings 17: 1-5, 7-24](#)

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It is time for beach reads and I'm wondering what is the best beach read you've ever read? There are lists out with big-name bestsellers, books like *The Da Vinci Code*, *Eat Pray Love*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Godfather*, even *Murder on the Orient Express* which means beach reads have been around for a long time. Agatha Christi wrote it

in 1934. One classic all-time beach read thrillers actually took place on a beach, published forty years later in 1974. Anybody got a guess what it is? *Jaws*. It was one of the first beach reads to be made into a blockbuster movie. Many have found the silver screen since. Now, a lot of beach reads, particularly mysteries, are written like they are planning on a movie deal.

Thriller mysteries have a familiar thread. A hero emerges in a time of trouble discovering unknown powers or strength to do battle with whatever force, evil or threat to humanity is out there. Lots of time, there is the outrageous. You may think, "Yeah right, a great white shark that is 25 feet and weighs 3 tons. I don't know if that's true. I don't even know if that is possible." But you still turn every page or hold onto your seat, because a great beach read needs this. You suspend reality and allow the story to speak its truth.

The Bible is full of stories like this and we've got a great one this year. I promise that some of it will stretch your imagination. You will think, "Wow how did that happen, how is that possible?" That's alright. Just think how many times you do that with beach reads or in blockbuster movies. If you are really worried about things that happen, consider this. Jesus owned and claimed the truth of this story and says so in the 4th chapter of Luke. He knew that this story had been told and retold and told again until it achieved enough status to qualify as "scripture." The route from initial experience to canonical status is hidden from us. But the chain of voices whereby each generation hears and trusts enough to hand on "...to you as of first importance what I, in turn, had received." (1 Corinthians 15:3) is important.¹ Jesus knew and taught that and that's good enough for me. So, none of the

"Wow, how did that happen?" or "Come on, really?" There is truth in the story for all of us.

It's a timely truth, too. Some of the things that Elijah goes through sound like what we are going through. He felt anxiety and doubt, fear, and isolation. Anybody experience that over the past five months? It shouldn't surprise us. James tells "Elijah was a person just like us" (James 5:17a) Just like you and me except that he is going to have to face an evil king with a wicked wife who encourages the king to do even worse things than he would normally do. There is going to be a supernatural disaster, which will shut down the economy. There will be animals acting strangely, incredible culinary and death-defying miracles, a pyrotechnic half-time show, a great mentor relationship with a hero in waiting, and an out of this world, ride into outer space. If that's not the making of a great beach read, I don't know what is.

Before we get to his story, let me set the stage. This Bible beach read takes place 870 years before the birth of Jesus. God's people, once a united kingdom are now two. At the death of Solomon in 930, they divide with the northern tribes becoming Israel and the southern tribes, Judah. For over 60 years, Israel, the northern kingdom had 7 kings. Every king was bad, "did evil" in sight of the Lord. This is the Bible's way of saying they weren't faithful to Yahweh and the Law of Moses. Each king was worse than the previous until Ahab. He was the "baddest" of the bad. Ahab did "...more evil in the eyes of the LORD" than any of the kings before him." (1 Kings 16:30)

There was a reason. Not only did he break all of the rules, but he also married a Phoenician princess, whose name is synonymous with a wicked woman, Jezebel. Jezebel brought with her love and devotion to the god Baal and Ahab joined her, "...and served Baal, and worshiped him, He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria." (1 Kings 16:31b-32). Not only did Ahab break the laws and commandments and marry outside of the faith, but he also promoted the worship of Baal with a temple and fertility poles. He was indeed the baddest of the bad, more evil than all the kings before him which brings us to our Bible beach read. Let's pick up the book and begin the story.

Without any introduction or explanation, out of the blue, he appears. "There is a guy from Tishbe wanting to see you." "Tishbe? Where in the heck is Tishbe?" "I have no idea. It is over in Gilead somewhere, east of the Jordan." "Send him away. I don't want to see him." "You might want to reconsider, King Ahab." "Why?" "His name is Elijah."

It's what opened the door. Elijah. It comes from three root words in Hebrew. "El" stands for Elohim or God. "I" is the personal pronoun for my or mine. "Jah" comes from Jehovah, and so put together, the name literally means "the Lord is Jehovah." My God is Jehovah.

Elijah and Ahab meet and the conversation goes something like this.

I'm Elijah; you know what it means. The Lord is Jehovah. My God is it. There is no Baal. But since you don't seem to understand this, I've got a message. No rain. We'll see how your fertility god fares. Let me be absolutely clear. "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1) And with that, he dropped the mic and walked out leaving Ahab, thinking, "Oh, come on. Didn't Moses already warn us in the Torah that the rain would cease and the land would not give forth its produce if we should worship other gods? Yet, nothing has happened! No rain? Yeah right." But Elijah was right.

A drought began that day and with it, a complete and total economic shutdown. In an agriculturally driven economy, no rain shuts down everything. It's not just a shortage of toilet paper or a run on flour or oil. It was more than that. You had to live on what you had stored up. There was no warning, other than the warning that God had given all along. There wasn't a public service announcement that warned that global warming was going to cause a long drought. It just happens and it lasted not one, not two but three and one-half years. ²

What would you do? Elijah knew what to do because before the mic even hits the floor, God spoke to Elijah. He says "Go." "The word of the Lord came to him, saying, Go" (1 Kings 17:2-3a) Elijah is going to hear that word a lot over the next few years of his life. God says, "Go. Go hide yourself. Stay in place during this natural disaster by the Cherith ravine, east of the Jordan River. I'm going to take care of you with bird food and you can prepare for what is to come." Because Elijah is just like us, he has to prepare. He has to learn to trust God, to follow his direction, to discover that he has more in him than he thought possible. Doing battle with forces of evil requires a season of preparation. Before you can run a marathon, you have to go into training. Before you can serve your country in war, you have to go to boot camp. God is saying, "...before I can do something through you, I have to do something in you."³

Just like us, he finds himself alone, by the Cherith ravine. Cherith in Hebrew means, cut-off. Elijah is cut-off at the cut-off ravine. At least he had water. But just as promised, an ancient Door Dash was going to serve him. God

commanded the ravens to feed him. "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening." (1 Kings 17:6) Where did the ravens get meat and bread? Legend has it that it came from the royal table of the King of Judah. Imagine the king's surprise when the ravens swooped down upon his table and disappeared again with part of his meal! When this became a regular occurrence the king ordered that a special portion of bread and meat be served with his meals, and the ravens never failed to pick it up.⁴

However the provisions end up before him, Elijah was well-fed and watered. He was learning to trust that God would provide his "daily bread." He was learning to become totally dependent on God. And since "Elijah is a person, just like us, (During this time) he prayed fervently that it might not rain..."(James 5:17b) Maybe "God, please don't let it rain. Please don't let it rain." Why? Because Elijah told Ahab it wouldn't rain except by his word. He was praying that God's word to him was true. Again, he was learning to trust God in prayer.⁵ But of course, be careful what you pray for because eventually, the brook of Cherinth dried up. Elijah prayed himself right out of water. What now? "Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Go." (1 Kings 17:9-10a).

It was time for Elijah to move on, to another place to discover that others will trust his word. "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." (1 Kings 17:10) Elijah goes on the move and reaches the gates of Zarephath and sees a woman gathering sticks for a fire.

"Lady, please bring me a little water and a morsel of bread."

"Right. Water. Where have you been? Water? Bread? Listen, pal. As God is my witness, I have nothing, just "...a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I amgoing home to prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." (1 Kings 17:12)

"Hold on. Let's not go there. Don't be afraid. I'm a person just like you and I have a word for you, "Go." It's my word between me and God. Go." "go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son" (1 Kings 17:13). "Believe me. Trust my words. The jar and jug won't go empty. You'll see. Go." And she does. And there was enough, not just for the three but her household as well.

"Mister, how did this happen?"

"It happened because of trust. You trusted that the jar of meal and the jug of oil would not be emptied because of the word that I spoke, because of the promise of the Lord."

The widow didn't know, couldn't know that God was using her to work in Elijah. Why? Because God had to work *in* Elijah before he could work *through* Elijah. Elijah needed to trust God's promises and trust God's proclamations. But he has one more lesson of trust to learn before he can take on the evil king and his wicked wife. He had to trust that even though he is just a person like us, he can call upon God's power.

That trust comes after weeks and months of dipping ciabatta in oil at the widow's table. It comes when tragedy struck. A mysterious virus attacked her son and it took his breath away. He died and the woman, in her grief, took it out on Elijah.

"You call yourself a man of God? Look what you've done. You've turned God against me. Is he judging me because of the false gods? Why? Why? The grief of a mourning mother is poured out on him. But Elijah, because God was working in him so that he might work through him, did something he had never done before.

"Give me your son!" he said and when she did, he took him to the upper room and laid him on the very bed where he'd been sleeping these many years. He looks up to heaven and says, "God, I think you could heal this little guy. Let's do this. I'm trusting you." He says it not once, not twice, but three times because somehow he knows that new life is associated with the number three. Three times, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." (1 Kings 17:21) And "The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived." (1 Kings 17:22)

Full of life and full of breath he takes the child downstairs and gives him to his mother. See, your son is alive! And she said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17:24) And Elijah knows it too because God has work in him, helping his trust his promises, his proclamations, and now his power. Now he was ready, ready to be that man of God, the hero needed to take on the evil empire.

With that, the first chapter of this great bible beach read ends and as it comes to close, you know this truth. Before God can work through you, God must work in you. That's something you should trust because it worked in the life of someone just like us. Before God can work through you, God must work in you.

Oh, if you want to sneak a peek at what comes in chapter two of this Bible beach read, you find it starts with the word “Go”.

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *Testimony to Otherwise*. Chalice Press, 2001. p. 1.

² Bottini, G. C. (2019). Continuity and Innovation in Biblical Tradition: Elijah from 1 Kgs 17-18 to Jas 5:17-18. *Studia Biblica Slovaca*, 11(2), 120–129.

³ Cohn, R. L. (1982). The literary logic of 1 Kings 17-19. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 101(3), 333–350.

⁴ An interpretive rabbinic midrash is known as an *aggada* which is widely found on the internet. Another suggestion that the meat was stolen from Ahab’s slaughterhouse.

⁵ Kovalishyn, Mariam Kamell. 2018. “The Prayer of Elijah in James 5: An Example of Intertextuality.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137 (4): 1027–45.