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**But the
Brook
Dried Up!**

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Series: Living Legends - Part 3

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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But the Brook Dried Up!

No one could really describe either the man or his ministry. He came from virtually nowhere; and as his most unusual life unfolded, he exhibited both the height of faith, bravery, and obedience, and the depths of cowardice, self-pity, and fear. His exhibition of confidence in God, at one point in his life, will go down in history as one of the most incredible feats of standing alone ever recorded; yet within days, perhaps hours, he was bathed in a sea of loneliness and despair, assuming that only he and God were left. His is a life that both epitomizes the greatness we long for and the weaknesses in our lives we so loathe, all rolled into one.

His name is Elijah. He was just a man with pretty much the same frailties, the same weaknesses, and the same problems that you and I have. We know that, because James wrote about him in James, chapter five, and he said so. Yet, when he was filled with God and obedient to God, Elijah appeared to be *almost more than a man*, because of the seemingly supernatural things he did. In the next few lessons, we will look at this Living Legend in detail. We will seek to determine just why God so used him, and why, in the end, when all of success seemed to be in his grasp, he seemed to fall apart.

This lesson will mark part one of a mini-series entitled: The Living Legend of Elijah. And the title of Part One will be: But the Brook Dried Up.

Our story is found in I Kings 17. Our outline for the next two lessons will look like this:

- I- You Want Me to do What, Lord? (verses 1-6)
- II- Lord, About the Water (verse 7)
- III- You Want Me to Go Where, Lord? (verses 8-12)
- IV- Now Look What Happened, Lord (verses 13-16)

You might also look at the four points in this outline as four steps in discovering the will of God; for in this story, God teaches

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His prophet four basic lessons. They would be:

- 1- The Will of God and His Direction (1-6)
- 2- The Will of God and His Timing (7)
- 3- The Will of God and His Purpose (8-12)
- 4- The Will of God and His Provision (13-16)

YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT, LORD?

The story of this man's life has one of the most abrupt beginnings in Biblical history. He simply *appears upon the scene*. There is no genealogy, no history of his family, no explanation of his roots, not even an explanation of why he was where he was when he was. He just appears. Some scholars liken him in that regard to Melchizidek, who was without father or mother. In fact, the manner in which he simply arrived on the scene has caused some to imagine him to be an angel, or some kind of spirit being, but of course, as we noted, James puts that to rest, as does the latter part of the story of his life.

So he wasn't an angel, not in any sense of the word. But he was a man, *a very special man*, a man anointed by God, sent by God, empowered by God, directed by God, and protected by God for most of his almost unbelievable life. Let's look in on Scripture, as out of the clear blue sky, a man named Elijah descends onto its pages and makes his first appearance. We will be reading along in I Kings, chapter 16, minding our own business, when these words appear:

In his days, Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD, which had been spoken through Joshua, the son of Nun.

(I Kings 16:34 NKJV)

And Elijah, the Tisbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

(I Kings 17:1 NKJV)

From out of nowhere there comes a prophet of God to confront King Ahab and warn him of an impending disaster so critical that the entire nation would stand on the brink of destruction because of it. And yet we do not know who he is or who he was or where he came from. We do know, however, that he came from God because he is not prophesying of himself. He places the credit for

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the words he speaks squarely on the shoulders of his God, whom he clearly names as “The Lord God of Israel”. And he makes it clear to Ahab that it is his God who is punishing Israel by taking from them the one ingredient they cannot live without...water. “Until I speak again, Ahab, there will not only not be a rainstorm forecast on the ten o'clock news, there will not even be a drop of dew on Israel's soil as the sun lifts its head above the clouds and sheds its rays on your once green pastures.” No rain, no dew, nothing. There you have the sum total of Elijah's first recorded discourse. The first thing we know he said was said to one of the most powerful men in the world, and was said unequivocally as a word from God.

And that's all he said. We don't even really know how Ahab responded. We only know that God, apparently pleased with Elijah's declaration of discipline on Israel, now speaks to the prophet and gives him the first of a series of micro-discourses on the will of God. He begins this way:

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying,

“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”

So he went and he did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.

And it happened after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

(I Kings 17:2-7 NKJV)

As the passage begins, God is giving Elijah his marching orders. Now we don't know a lot about his personality at this stage of his life, but we will be learning as we go that this was no shy, retiring, fearful man. He may well prove to be so independent and so self-sufficient that, while he would be a leader among men, he may not be an effective leader of men. There is, you know, a difference. Nonetheless, we do know that he is aggressive, forceful, bold, and self-confident.

And it's important to know that! Because *where* God sends

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you and *how* God leads you is often in direct proportion to what the world calls your strengths. You say, “Oh, you mean God wants to use my strengths so he sends me where I can show them off?”

No! Usually, God has to take you where your strengths are no longer a factor, and you come to realize you can’t trust them to deliver you. You see, Elijah must have been feeling pretty good about himself about now. Here was his first assignment (at least the first one we know about), and what an assignment it was! God said, “Elijah, I need someone who is willing to go stand before a king and stare him in the face, eye-to-eye, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord!’ I need a man that brave.”

“I’m your man, Lord!” Elijah must have responded, “I’m your man!” So he went and he did what God told him to do. In fact, we’ll see that very phrase recur in our passage momentarily. “He went and he did what he was told.”

It was exciting! It was dangerous! It was a challenge! It was the will of God.

Now for round two. An excited Elijah, filled with the emotions of victory, returns from his successful encounter with the king and stands before *the real King, Jehovah God*, waiting for his next instructions. “No telling what God might have in mind now,” he must have been thinking!

Right, Elijah, no telling....

God speaks!

“Ready for another assignment, lad?”

“Ready, Lord!”

“Good. Now here’s what I want you to do.” (You can almost see Elijah’s eyes widen with excitement; then you can almost see him cock his head like a beagle puppy, and ask, “You want me to do what, Lord?”)

“I want you to catch the first bus out of town, Elijah, and go hide yourself by the Brook Cherith. And don’t expect a welcoming committee! There’ll be nobody there but you! No fellowship! No ministry! Nothing! I’ll send you food twice a day by a raven. You’ll get your liquid refreshment by dippin’ your nose in the brook like a puppy dog. Got it? Twice a day the raven will come. Otherwise, nothing.”

I can almost hear Elijah answer: “Lord, let’s go through that

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one more time. You see, I'm a little hard of hearing. I thought you said, "I'm sending you by a brook." You must have meant "with a cook". And for a minute, I thought you said, a "raven will feed you". I know you must have meant "the nation will need you".

"No child," the Lord replied. "You heard Me right. By a brook, as in water. By a raven, as in a bird."

So there we have Elijah's new assignment.

It would be humiliating.

It would be boring.

It would be lonely.

But it, too, would be the will of God!

In fact, it would take a taller man spiritually to go sit by a brook and wait for a bird, than it would take to stand before a king with the Word of the Lord. Elijah had just received the most difficult assignment God ever gives anyone. It was: "Go! Be by yourself, just you and God. And...wait." That's right, wait. As the old song said: "Do nothin' till you hear from me." Nothin'.

And it's when we're given *that kind of assignment* that most of us miss the will of God. Most of us are willing even to stand before angry authorities and declare God's Word, but precious few of us are willing to stand in the shadows and sit quietly by still waters while God restores our souls. Most of us are actually eager to go out and be used and be seen feeding the flock. But precious few are willing to wait quietly for our next meal and be fed in ways miraculous, though humiliating. No, God had great plans for this man Elijah. But until Elijah had sat still long enough to know who God was, he would never be able to stand before an army of demonic hosts and call down fire from heaven. So this was a key class in the heavenly curriculum God had designed for his student.

Nonetheless, Elijah went, and he did what God told him to do. In fact, the first great quality that surfaces in this man's life is the quality of obedience in the face of circumstances that require virtually blind faith.

Now I don't know about you, but I think most of us would have responded, "You want me to do what, Lord? Go someplace where nobody knows me? Have to depend on a miracle for food every day?"

"Lord, it's me! Harry Hotshot! Sammy Spiritual! Isaac

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Important! You *need* me, don't you, Lord? I mean, we've got all this stuff goin', just me and you. Why, what are you going to do while I'm off in the bushes, Lord? Who's going to run the church? Who's going to confront kings for you? Who's going to prophesy droughts for you? Besides, Lord, my ministry skills will get rusty, if I don't use 'em. And time is short, isn't it Lord? I mean, we don't have long to win the world, you and me?"

"You *still* want me to do *what*, Lord? Go down by that nice, quiet stream over there; sit still, and wait. And just let YOU meet my needs...one day at a time?"

How humiliating.
How demeaning.
How Perfect!

The perfect way for God to take a self-satisfied saint and turn him into an empty vessel, a usable tool.

Is that where you are in your pilgrimage? Are you still off in the shadows waiting to be discovered, waiting for God to call your name and usher you into the realms of prosperity and success? Did God send you where you are; yet is where you are demeaning, unpretentious, unfulfilling? Do you have to literally depend on a miracle from God for your daily food? Don't move, my friend; don't move. The Master Teacher is teaching you life's greatest lesson of all...the lesson of preparation.

Sit still, and learn it well. Because the better you learn by the brook, the stronger you'll be on the mountain.

LORD, ABOUT THE WATER

So Elijah went and he did what the Lord commanded. It wasn't easy. It was harder than confronting Ahab, but he did it. And sure enough, twice a day, God sent the ravens with a "Big Mac" or a "Whopper burger", and Elijah would gulp it down, and then stick his face in the brook and get a sip or two of H₂O (water).

But one day, as he was sippin' he noticed something. It seemed as though each day he had to bend down a little further to get to the water fountain. No genius that he was, he put two and two together and got four. "Hey, Lord, this brook's dryin' up! You sent me here, humiliating as it is, and agreed to meet my needs. You haven't forgotten me have you, Lord?"

"No, my child, I haven't forgotten. The raven still comes in the

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morning, doesn't he?"

"Yes, Lord."

"The raven still comes in the evening, doesn't he?"

"Yes, Lord."

"No, I haven't forgotten you."

"But, Lord, look, you sent me to a rushing stream, but the brook dried up!"

"Yes, child, I know," God must have said. "No rain, remember? You were the messenger boy who told the king 'no rain'. No rain—no river. Got it? You see, the rain falls (or doesn't fall) on the just and the unjust alike. Got it?"

"Got it, Lord. But, Lord, what if I get thirsty?"

"Child, trust me. Before the last drop of water dribbles through that brook, I'll tell you what to do. Until then, just sit still and wait. This isn't a course in water conservation. This is a course in spiritual transformation."

Some of you can relate to Elijah's plight, can't you? You were earnestly seeking to do the will of God; you were willing to go to Africa or Israel or South America to preach the Gospel. You were willing to sell what you had and give it to the poor. You were willing to stand before princes and kings and say, "Thus saith the Lord!". You were willing.

Instead God said, "No, here, take this job." "No, here, take this husband." "No, here, take this wife...and go off into the shadows and learn of Me."

"I'll feed you, sometimes supernaturally, and life's brooks will quench your thirst quite naturally."

So, like Elijah, you went and you did what God commanded. But the economy went sour, or the marriage became difficult, or the kids got sick, or the boss got mad...

...and the brook dried up!

The very place God sent you lost its luster. The very thing God did for you ceased to be. The very person God gave you left. The brook dried up.

And you began to cry, "Lord, what happened? I did what you asked. I went where you sent me. I did all I knew to do...and now

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this!”

And the Lord answers softly, “Now HEAR this. You are still in the will of God. Now I AM is the only source of deliverance you have. You said you wanted to know Me, so I sent ravens to feed you, and gave you a rushing brook to quench your thirst. And you came to know me as you never had before. Now, I’m letting the brook dry up, and you will come to know Me even better. I know it took faith to wait for ravens who were never late; but it takes real faith to wait beside a drying brook. That’s why the brook dried up. Because I love you so much I removed even the natural blessings I had surrounded you with to prepare you for the supernatural blessings I have in store.”

That may be where you are today. That’s where our hero, Elijah, is in our story. And if we want just a tiny preview of the next episode in his life, all we have to do is read the next verse:

Then the Word of the LORD came to him, saying,

“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”
(I Kings 17:8,9 NKJV)

Zarephath? A widow? Tune in next week for even more surprises in the life of God’s “miracle man in the making”, and you’ll see his first real ministry upon leaving his retreat house at Cherith.

But for now, let’s focus on the principles that surface thus far in Elijah’s life. Remember, the story serves as a picture book to help us remember the principles, but if we remember the story, and don’t apply the principles, we might as well have taken in a good movie.

Remember, stories illustrate. Rules regulate. But principles go to work in our lives to make godliness a reality. So what are the principles found in I Kings 17:1-7? Let’s look at them:

1- It doesn’t matter where you came from in the Christian Life. Your ancestry or heritage has no bearing on God’s decision to use you in the battle. Your dad may have been a general in God’s army, but if you haven’t enlisted and stayed on for basic training, there are no medals for being someone else’s child. Conversely, you may have come from a hotbed of agnostics and atheists, and found Jesus, and you may be the next Billy Graham on God’s docket. We don’t even know where Elijah came from. I

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believe that's by divine design to remind us that we stand alone before God, no matter whose child we are.

2- Sometimes God gives us great ministries early in our Christian lives to give us a glimpse of what He can do, then sends us into spiritual hibernation for a while until we grow into the task. He did with Moses. He did with Elijah. He did with Paul. Instant leadership is bad news. Usually, real spirituality is accompanied by cycles of success, interspersed with valleys of testing to teach us humility.

3- The will of God is not always glamorous. He needs troopers behind the lines, too. He needs ministers to starving widows, just as He does to confront kings. If you are judging whether or not you are in the will of God by where you are, be careful. Using that criteria, Elijah would have been in trouble. It isn't where you are in life that's important, but where God is in your life that's important.

4- The natural laws of man don't always bend around the church. In a recession, Christians go broke, too. In a storm, Christians die, too. In an epidemic, Christians get sick, too. And it isn't because they're out of the will of God. It's because the will of God includes living in a world that is under the domain of Satan for a season. In heaven, there will be no recessions. In heaven, there will be no storms. In heaven, there will be no epidemics. In heaven, the natural will dissolve in the arms of the eternal. But stop condemning Christians who get sick or go broke or lose their jobs as being in sin. That's sick theology.

5- Don't run when your brook runs dry. Stay where you are and wait for a word from God. He hasn't forgotten you. He can't. He won't.

But the very nature of our wills and His necessitates split-second timing for Him to receive maximum glory. Chances are, if He arrives by that drying brook with water one second too soon, we'll attribute it to some natural phenomenon. But if He waits till all hope is gone, He gets glorified, and we grow.

In closing, remember, Elijah was a guy pretty much like you, pretty much like me. He had lots of problems, lots of weaknesses, and his road to success in the ministry was certainly dotted with what the world would call a lot of unnecessary detours.

But they weren't detours. They were divinely designed

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training missions, that the Commander-in-Chief had placed on his itinerary to get him where he needed to be. God wanted to use him, so God had to take him way, way off by a little brook. And because He really wanted to use him, God even had to let the brook dry up. He did for Elijah. He may for you. He may for me. But it was, and it is all a part of the wonderful plan of our wonderful God whose wonderful will is perfect. Don't run, Beloved, when the brook dries up. Just around the corner, there lies a river, "the streams whereof make glad the city of God".

POOR OLD ELIJAH

Poor old Elijah.
Just look at that poor old guy.
There he sits by that little stream,
Watching the brook run dry.

You cannot help but wonder,
What did the guy do wrong?
When God went and sent him to Ahab
He turned and went right along.

Then look how God rewarded him
For all of his faithful deeds;
He sent him out by a little creek
And sent ravens to meet his needs.

Poor old Elijah
He had such a future, it seems,
But now, there he is by that drying brook
And there go all of his dreams.

Oh, be careful, my child, lest you misunderstand
How the will of God unfolds.
He does not take you straight to the mount
Where the victor's cannon rolls.

He takes you first to a little stream
Where few, if any, have trod;
And there, all alone, with naught but Himself
You learn of the heart of God.

(Poem continued next page)

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And sometimes, e'en as there you wait
By that quiet little brook,
The flow of the water will ebb and cease
So God can see how you look...

How you look when the rivers of life run dry
And there's no place to turn.
He has to see you by drying brooks;
He has to see if you'll learn.

But, oh, Beloved, if you learn well,
As by that brook you wait,
Your God will be building a plan for you
To make your ministry great.

So quietly stay where you are my child;
Let God your necessities bring...
And remember, Beloved, drying brooks
Are the waiting rooms of the King.

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