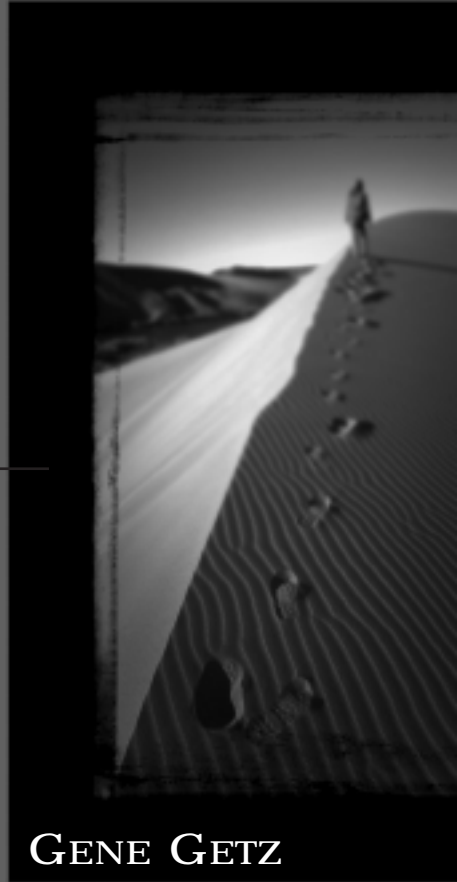


# UNWAVERING TENACITY

INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF ELIJAH



GENE GETZ



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# UNWAVERING TENACITY

## A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

Elijah—Once you meet him, you'll never forget him. Best known for his confrontational leadership style and incredible spiritual victories, Elijah was characterized by an unwavering tenacity. Despite experiencing periods of fearfulness, hopelessness, and depression, Elijah remained steadfast. The result? God would use him to tear down Israel's alters and idols and change the moral and political landscape of his day.

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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While this Bible study may be used individually, it is designed to be used within the context of small groups. Each group meeting should include all parts of the following “three-part agenda.”

**Ice-Breaker:** Fun, history-giving questions are designed to warm the group and to build understanding about the other group members. You can choose to use all of the Ice-Breaker questions, especially if there is a new group member who will need help in feeling comfortable with the group.

One of the purposes of this book is to begin and to then solidify a group. Therefore, getting to know one another and bonding together are essential to the success of this course. The goal is to get better acquainted during the Ice-Breaker part of each group session.

**Bible Study:** The heart of each meeting is the examination of the Bible. The questions are open, discovery questions that lead to further inquiry. Reference notes are provided to give everyone a “level playing field.” The emphasis is on understanding what the Bible says and applying the truth to real life. The questions for each session build. There is always at least one “going deeper” question provided. You should always leave time for the last of the “questions for interaction.” Should you choose, you can use the optional “going deeper” question to satisfy the desire for the challenging questions in groups that have been together for a while.

To help connect as a group, it is important for everyone to participate in the Bible Study. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. The group members should strive to make all of the other group members feel comfortable during the Bible Study time. Because we all have differing levels of biblical knowledge, it is essential that we appreciate the personal context from which answers are given. We don't have to know much about Scripture to bring our own perspectives on the truths contained in the Scriptures. It is vital to keep encouraging all group members to share what they are observing as we work through these important Bible passages.

**Caring Time:** All study should point us to actions. Each session ends with prayer and direction in caring for the needs of the group members. You can choose between several questions.

Small groups help the larger body of Christ in many ways: caring for individuals, holding one another up in prayer, providing emotional support, and bringing new men into the body by reaching out to new guys. Each week it is important to remember to pray for those whom God would bring to your group.

## HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

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Begin by reviewing the following ground rules and talk about the importance of “sharing your story” (see below).

### GROUND RULES

- **Priority:** While you are in the group, you give the group meeting priority.
- **Participation:** Everyone participates, and no one dominates.
- **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to their own opinion, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.

- **Empty Chair:** The group stays open to new men at every meeting.
- **Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other in time of need—even in the middle of the night.
- **Advice Giving:** Unsolicited advice is not allowed.
- **Mission:** We agree to do everything in our power to start a new group as our mission.

## SHARING YOUR STORY

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These sessions are designed for members to share a little of their personal lives each time the group meets. Through a number of special techniques, each member is encouraged to move from low risk, less personal sharing to higher risk responses. This helps develop community and facilitates caregiving.

Only when group members begin to share their own story does the group bond at levels deep enough for life-change to take place.

# PERSONAL NOTES

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# THE INTRICACIES OF IDOLATRY

## WELCOME

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Elijah is one of the unforgettable men of the Bible. On one hand, he dared great exploits for God. On the other hand, he experienced fear, loneliness, and dark depression. In spite of Elijah's flaws, God used him mightily and took him to heaven before he died. No matter what your circumstances, you can learn lessons from Elijah that will transform the rest of your life.



## ICE-BREAKER

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We don't go in for idols of gold, wood, or stone in Western culture. Our idols come in other guises, such as sports figures, entertainers, and people of wealth or power. Perhaps we get addicted to substances, pornography, gambling, or some such vice. Very often we give a degree of allegiance to our jobs that should belong only to God.

1. When you were a boy, which of these did you idolize? Give a specific example.
  - a. Sports heroes
  - b. Cartoon or comic book superheroes
  - c. Schoolteachers or coaches
  - d. Movie stars or rock musicians
  - e. Your parents
  - f. Other
2. As an adult, to which of these things that compete for our time and money are you most attracted? How much time do you invest in this each week?
  - a. Electronic gadgets
  - b. New cars or trucks
  - c. The Internet
  - d. Tools
  - e. Guns
  - f. Working out

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

King Solomon married foreign wives and allowed them to introduce idolatry in his court (1 Kings 11:1-8). After Solomon's death around 930 B.C., civil war split the nation into a northern kingdom called Israel and a southern kingdom called Judah (12:20). Solomon's descendants ruled the latter. Jeroboam, the first king of northern Israel (931-910 B.C.), set up two golden calves to represent the Lord so his subjects would not go to Jerusalem in Judah to worship (vv. 26-30). About 60 years later, King Ahab (874-853 B.C.) and Queen Jezebel introduced out-and-out idolatry to Israel. Elijah arose to oppose them (16:29-33).

Elijah was a big character to confront a big problem in ninth century B.C. Israel. Idolatry in the form of Baal worship was sweeping Israel and threatening Judah. God wanted to do something dramatic. He couldn't have chosen a more dramatic figure than Elijah.

### **Idols to Represent the Lord**

<sup>26</sup> Jeroboam said to himself, "[The way things are going] now, the kingdom might return to the house of David. <sup>27</sup> If these people regularly go to offer sacrifices in the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will return to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will murder me and go back to the king of Judah." <sup>28</sup> So the king sought advice.

Then he made two gold calves, and he said to the people, "Going to Jerusalem is too difficult for you. Israel, here is your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." <sup>29</sup> He set up one in Bethel, and put the other in Dan. <sup>30</sup> This led to sin; the people walked [in procession] before one of the calves all the way to Dan.

<sup>31</sup> Jeroboam also built shrines on the high places and set up priests from every class of people who were not Levites.

*1 Kings 12:26-31*

### **Idols Instead of the Lord**

<sup>29</sup> Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Judah's King Asa; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria 22 years. <sup>30</sup> But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight more than all who were before him. <sup>31</sup> Then, as if following the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat were a trivial matter, he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and then proceeded to serve Baal and worship him. <sup>32</sup> He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he had built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> Ahab also made an Asherah pole. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings

of Israel who were before him. ...

<sup>1</sup> Now Elijah the Tishbite, from the Gilead settlers, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, I stand before Him, and there will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command!”

*1 Kings 16:29-33; 17:1*

### **A Man of Earnest Prayer**

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land.

*James 5:17*

## PRINCIPLE DEVELOPMENT

The final verses of the Old Testament pair Moses and Elijah to represent the Law and the prophets (Mal. 4:4-6). The New Testament then opens with John the Baptist coming “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17) and Jesus fulfilling Moses’ prediction of another prophet like him (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37). Moses and Elijah represented the Law and prophets when they joined Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30-31). The two witnesses of Revelation 11 wield powers like those of Moses and Elijah (Rev. 11:6).

The prophets called God’s people back to God’s Law. In that sense, Elijah always pointed to Moses. The lessons we draw from the beginning of the Elijah narratives have to do with “syncretism,” the intentional or unintentional mixing of two different religions. Elijah pointed to the Law of Moses as the way to keep things straight spiritually. Today we don’t mix faith in the living God with rituals to statues of false gods, but we can easily intermingle commitment to God and commitment to various worldly values. We have two ways to guard against idolatry in any form.

### PRINCIPLE 1

**WE MUST MAKE RIGHT CHOICES.**

God commissioned the prophet Elijah to confront idolatry in Israel. Without background or fanfare, he suddenly appeared on the pages of the Old Testament. He’s simply identified as “Elijah the Tishbite, from the Gilead settlers” (1 Kings 17:1). The Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, said he was “Elijah from Tishbe in Gilead.” Nobody knows where Tishbe was. Gilead stretches from the

Jarmuk River in the north down to the Dead Sea east of the Jordan River, part of the present-day country of Jordan.

When Elijah marched into Ahab's presence to proclaim God's judgment, he faced a wicked man. The prophetic message was crisp, concise, and very clear! It's probably the most powerful one-line message delivered by anyone in Israel's history: "There will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command" (v. 1).

Elijah demonstrated serious dedication to the living God. Ahab could not miss the source of Elijah's declaration: "As the LORD God of Israel lives" (v. 1). In essence the prophet said, "Ahab, you serve dead gods! I serve a God who is alive!"

Do you see Elijah's choices? He committed himself to God's Person. He committed himself to God's message. He committed himself to God's ways. We, too, must make these choices. Day by day we need to renew our commitments to God's Person, message, and ways. If we don't, we'll get subtly trapped in some form of syncretism involving the values of our materialistic, consumer society.

## PRINCIPLE 2

WE MUST LOOK CAREFULLY AT HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S ETERNAL WORD.

The Scriptures simply state that Elijah had an audience with Ahab and made his pronouncement: "As the LORD God of Israel lives, I stand before Him, and there will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command!" (1 Kings 17:1). Is it possible that Elijah had no specific word from God regarding what was about to happen? God had already spoken to Israel regarding what would transpire if they committed idolatry (Lev. 26:19-20; Deut. 11:16-17; 28:23-24). Perhaps Elijah prayed and asked God to withhold rain from the earth based on His earlier messages to Moses.

James says Elijah was an ordinary man who "prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land" (James 5:17). Apparently Elijah exercised great faith in the living God and confronted Ahab based on what he already knew God said He would do under those circumstances.

How will we recognize the false gods of our day? We need to saturate our hearts and minds with the truth of God's Word so we recognize when a cultural value or a post-modern attitude violates His standards. Once we recognize and face a god of our age, we should rely on the teaching of the Bible to shape our response to it.

## QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTION

1. Which of these best captures your reaction when you find yourself surrounded by people who are antagonistic to your Christian faith?
  - a. I clam up and look for a hole to crawl into.
  - b. I keep quiet and go about my business.
  - c. I express my opinions and let it go at that.
  - d. I love a fight. I argue with them loud and long.
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What qualities does a man need to stand up to a powerful opponent, as Elijah did to King Ahab?
3. About 60 years before the time of Elijah and Ahab, Jeroboam set up golden calves as worship objects in the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:28-29). What was he trying to accomplish with these idols?
4. How did Jeroboam's golden calves opened the way for out-and-out idolatry in Israel?
5. How did King Ahab lead Israel deeper into formal idolatry (1 Kings 16:30-33)?
6. How did Elijah identify the Lord to Ahab so the king would recognize Him as an opponent of Baal (1 Kings 17:1)?
7. How did Elijah put his own neck on the line as the representative of the Lord in His conflict with Baal (1 Kings 17:1)?
8. In the New Testament, James indicates that Elijah rather than the Lord may have initiated the conflict with Baal. How did James do that?
9. If Elijah relied on the promises of the Law (Deut. 11:16-17) instead of a direct command of God when he told Ahab it wasn't going to rain until he ordered it to, what kind of risk was he taking?



## GOING DEEPER

10. How can people, programs, and things that are meant to be aids to worship (like Jeroboam's calves) become objects of worship instead? Can you give an example?

11. What are the identifying marks of an idol in our culture?
12. How can knowledge of the Word of God protect us from unintentionally setting up an idol in our lives?



## CARING TIME

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The gods of our day are not carved or cast idols. They are humanistic gods, such as celebrities or cult leaders. They are materialistic gods, such as luxury possessions and love of money. They are sensual gods, such as sexual entertainment and Internet pornography. They are relational gods, represented by anyone more important to us than the living God. We need to care enough that we help one another identify and break free of any of these “idols.”

1. With which of these would you be most likely to commit idolatry?
  - a. A humanistic god.
  - b. A materialistic god.
  - c. A sensual god.
  - d. A relational god.
2. How can this group help you stay away from this false god?
3. What Bible verse or biblical truth can you use this week to remind you of the dangers of this false god?

## NEXT WEEK

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Next week we will look at how God protected Elijah from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel after he angered them by pronouncing a message of judgment against Israel because of its idolatry. God protects His servants from their enemies when they stand for the truth. That protection takes many forms. In Elijah’s case, protection involved a rocky ravine, a babbling brook, and ravens who flew in two meals a day. Sometimes we, too, experience dramatic deliverance from persecution. Sometimes God stands with us through unpleasant persecution. Either way, “He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps. 62:2,6).

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

### 1 KINGS 12:26-31

**12:26 Jeroboam said to himself.** Jeroboam had been promised that if he served God, God would build him a lasting dynasty (11:37-38). But Jeroboam did not trust God to establish his kingdom. He thought that if his people continued making pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem, he would lose control over them. To prevent that from happening, he decided to lead the people into idolatry.

**12:28 he made two golden calves.** Aaron had built a golden calf in Moses' day, then declared a festival to the Lord (Ex. 32:4-5). Like Aaron, Jeroboam may not have intended to worship the calves as pagan gods, but as symbols of the power of the one true God. Going to Jerusalem is too difficult. Even if this were true, the Israelites could have still worshiped God at His many altars throughout Israel (1 Kings 3:2-4). That would not have been ideal (Deut. 12:13-14; 1 Kings 3:2), but better than calf worship. Even Elijah would later pray at an altar in Israel (1 Kings 18:19,30-32).

**12:30 This led to sin.** When Aaron built the golden calf, Moses destroyed it in anger (Ex. 32:19-20), and for good reason. Building any idol broke the second commandment (20:4) and rapidly led to outright idol worship.

**12:31 shrines on the high places.** The Israelites had built altars to God on the tops of hills. It was also common for the pagans to build shrines to their gods on the highest peaks. **set up priests ... not Levites.** Jeroboam rejected God's priesthood and appointed priests from his followers. He then drove out the Levites who abandoned their homes and lands and headed to Judah in a mass exodus (1 Chron. 11:13-17; 13:9).

### NOTES ON 1 KINGS 16:29-33; 17:1

**16:3 married Jezebel.** The Assyrian empire, an ever-present threat of attack, was rumbling in the north. An alliance with the Phoenicians seemed like a good idea. A desire for better trade relations probably also influenced Ahab's decision to marry Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal. **Baal.** Baal means "lord" or "husband." Ethbaal was not only the king of Sidon, but high priest of the local Baal, a god named Melquart. Ethbaal's daughter, Jezebel, was utterly devoted to Baal, and she brought Baal worship to Israel. As angered as God was by the golden calves, Baal worship was even worse.

**16:33 Asherah pole.** Baal frequently was represented by an image of a bull. He was a fertility god whose female sexual partner, Asherah, was represented by a carved wooden pillar called an Asherah pole.

**17:1 *Elijah.*** After Moses, Elijah was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. When the northern kingdom was in its greatest spiritual darkness, Elijah appeared like a flash of lightning, suddenly and with great power. His power was not due to his own goodness or charisma. Elijah was very human (James 5:17). His power came from his relationship with God. Elijah's name ("Jehovah is my God") described his life and his message perfectly. He immediately obeyed every command God gave him. He was utterly uncompromising in his message, totally resolved to turn Israel back to God. The fate of Israel as a nation was already sealed (1 Kings 14:15-16), but God wanted to spare as many of its people as He could.

#### JAMES 5:17

**5:17 *man with a nature like ours.*** Elijah knew depression and doubt as did James' readers (1 Kings 19). And yet, God answered his prayer in a mighty way. Here James made it clear that all Christians can pray like this, not just prophets.