BOOKLET TO PRINT

The Prophet Elijah

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 20

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IN BRIEF

The Prophet Elijah

Great prophet of Israel in the ninth century BC, champion of the one God against the prophets of Baal, taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, spiritual father of Carmel.

Feast day	July 20
Era	9th century BC
Patron saint of	Carmel, Carmelites, hermits

In this booklet

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Stella Maris Monastery, Mount Carmel

Credits and sources

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LIFE

The Prophet Elijah

Elijah is one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. In the ninth century BC, in the kingdom of Israel, he stood alone against King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, who had brought in the worship of Baal. On Mount Carmel he challenged the prophets of Baal and called down fire from heaven. Discouraged, he met God at Horeb in "a still small voice," then was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Carmelite friars and nuns regard him as their spiritual father. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on July 20.

Who was the prophet Elijah?

His story is told in the first and second books of Kings (1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2). Elijah the Tishbite came from Gilead, east of the Jordan. His name, Eliyahu in Hebrew, means "My God is the Lord," and sums up his whole mission: to remind Israel, tempted by the fertility gods, that there is only one God. Clothed in a cloak of hair with a leather belt, solitary and fiery, he is the model of the prophet. Neither his birth nor his death is known, since the Bible says he was taken up to heaven.

Key dates

- **c. 870 BC**: Under King Ahab, Elijah announces a drought of several years.
- **The drought**: He hides by the brook Cherith, fed by ravens, then stays with a widow of Zarephath and raises her son.
- **Mount Carmel**: He confronts the prophets of Baal; fire from heaven consumes his sacrifice, then the rain returns.
- **The flight**: Threatened with death by Jezebel, he flees to the desert and walks forty days to Horeb.

- **At Horeb**: God reveals himself in a gentle breeze; Elijah calls Elisha to follow him.
- **Naboth's vineyard**: He condemns Ahab and Jezebel for the murder of an innocent farmer.
- **c. 850 BC**: He is taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, before Elisha's eyes, near the Jordan.

The drought, the ravens and the widow of Zarephath

Elijah suddenly appeared before King Ahab: "As the Lord lives, there shall be no dew or rain these years except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Then he hid by the brook Cherith, where ravens brought him bread and meat morning and evening. When the brook dried up, God sent him to Zarephath, in pagan territory, to a widow who had only a handful of flour and a little oil. Elijah asked her to share: "The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry." Later he brought her son back to life. Jesus would recall this story: God sent his prophet to a foreign woman (Luke 4:25-26).

Fire on Mount Carmel

In the third year, Elijah gathered all the people on Mount Carmel, facing the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal: "How long will you straddle the issue? If the Lord is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Each side prepared a bull on an altar without lighting the fire. The prophets of Baal cried out from morning to evening: nothing happened. Elijah had his altar drenched three times with water, then prayed simply. The fire of the Lord fell and consumed everything, even the water in the trench. The people fell on their faces: "The Lord is God!" Soon after, from the top of Carmel, Elijah's servant saw a small cloud rising from the sea, "as small as a man's hand," and the rain came at last.

The still small voice at Horeb

Threatened with death by Queen Jezebel, Elijah fled into the desert. Exhausted, he sat under a broom tree and prayed for death: "Enough, Lord!" An angel woke him twice: "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you." Strengthened by this bread, he walked forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God where Moses had received the Law.

There God passed by. There was a mighty wind, an earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was in none of them. Then came "a still small voice," the sound of a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12): Elijah hid his face in his cloak, for God was there. This page has become one of the most pondered in the Bible on silent prayer. God then sent Elijah back on mission and had him choose Elisha as his successor: Elijah threw his cloak over him, and Elisha left his oxen to follow him.

The chariot of fire

At the end of his mission, Elijah walked with Elisha toward the Jordan. He struck the water with his rolled-up cloak, and they crossed on dry ground. Elisha asked for a double share of his spirit. Then "a flaming chariot and flaming horses came between them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha picked up his master's fallen cloak and carried on his work. Because Elijah had not died, his return was expected before the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 3:23).

Elijah in the New Testament

The angel announced that John the Baptist would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), and Jesus said of John: "Elijah has already come." At the Transfiguration, on the mountain, Elijah and Moses appeared beside Jesus, the Law and the Prophets bearing witness to Christ. On the cross, when Jesus cried "Eli, Eli," some thought he was calling Elijah.

The father of Carmel

In the twelfth century, Latin hermits settled on Mount Carmel, near the "spring of Elijah," to live in prayer after his example. They were the origin of the Carmelite Order, which regards Elijah as its father and took his words as its motto: "I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts." The great Carmelite saints, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Edith Stein, were nourished by his example of solitude and prayer.

Why do Catholics honor the prophet Elijah?

Elijah is a man of fire, able to defy a king, and at the same time fragile, collapsing with exhaustion and wishing to die. God does not judge him: he feeds him, lets him sleep, then reveals himself in silence. Christians pray with Elijah for courage in faith, for strength in discouragement and to learn to listen to God in silence.

To pray with him, read the prayer to the prophet Elijah, or follow the novena to the prophet Elijah, from July 11 to 19.

Where to pray to the prophet Elijah

- **Haifa** (Israel): the Stella Maris Monastery on Mount Carmel, mother house of the Carmelites, built over the cave of Elijah.
- **Muhraqa** (Israel): on a summit of Carmel, a Carmelite monastery marks the traditional site of Elijah's sacrifice against the prophets of Baal.
- **Sinai** (Egypt): near Saint Catherine's Monastery, a chapel of Saint Elijah marks the place where, by tradition, he met God.
- **All over the world**: every Carmel keeps a living memory of the prophet, celebrated solemnly on July 20.

PRAYER

Prayer to the Prophet Elijah

About this prayer

The prophet Elijah is honored by Jews, by Christians of East and West, and above all by the Carmelite Order, which regards him as its father. The prayer below was composed for Saintspedia. It draws on the great moments of his life: his zeal on Mount Carmel, his discouragement under the broom tree, the angel's bread, and his meeting with God in the gentle breeze at Horeb.

Prayer to the Prophet Elijah

Saint Elijah, prophet of the living God,
you burned with zeal for the Lord
and dared to speak the truth to the powerful:
obtain for me the courage of faith
when it is hard to stay faithful.

You knew weariness and discouragement,
you sat under a broom tree and asked to die:
remember those who can go on no longer.
May the angel of the Lord say to them, as to you:
"Get up and eat, for the journey is long."

You recognized God not in the wind or the fire,
but in the sound of a gentle breeze:
teach me silence and listening,
so that I may hear God's voice in my life.

Today I entrust to you this intention: (state your intention).
Present it to the living God whom you served,
through Jesus Christ, whom you saw transfigured on the mountain.

Saint Elijah, pray for us. Amen.

Prayer composed for Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to him at any time, especially on July 20, his feast, in a moment of discouragement or exhaustion, before a decision that calls for courage, or to learn silent prayer. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to the prophet Elijah and read about the life of the prophet Elijah.

NOVENA

Novena to the Prophet Elijah

This novena was composed for Saintspedia and follows the life of the prophet Elijah in nine steps, as told in the books of Kings. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish on the eve of his feast, begin on July 11; it ends on July 19, before the feast of the prophet Elijah on July 20. It can also be prayed at any time, especially in a period of discouragement.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the Bible passage given, then say the prayer of the day. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into the day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

Day 1: "My God is the Lord"

Elijah's name sums up his life: he has only one God, and he says so before the king (1 Kings 17:1).

Prayer: Saint Elijah, I entrust to you my intention for these nine days. Help me put God in first place.

Act of the day: Identify an "idol" in your life, something that takes too much room, and put it back in its place.

Day 2: The ravens by the brook

Hidden by the brook Cherith, Elijah is fed morning and evening by ravens (1 Kings 17:2-6).

Prayer: Lord, teach me to rely on your providence, day after day.

Act of the day: Thank God before each meal for the food you receive.

Day 3: The widow of Zarephath

A poor widow shares her last handful of flour with Elijah, and her jar never runs empty (1 Kings 17:8-16).

Prayer: Lord, give me a generous heart that shares even when it has little.

Act of the day: Give something that really costs you.

Day 4: Fire on Carmel

On Mount Carmel, Elijah prays simply, and the fire of the Lord falls on the altar (1 Kings 18:20-39).

Prayer: Saint Elijah, obtain for me a burning faith and the courage not to "straddle the issue."

Act of the day: Share your faith simply with someone.

Day 5: The little cloud

Elijah prays seven times, his face between his knees, until a small cloud rises from the sea (1 Kings 18:41-45).

Prayer: Lord, give me perseverance in prayer, even when nothing seems to happen.

Act of the day: Take up an intention you had given up on and pray for it again.

Day 6: Under the broom tree

Exhausted, Elijah sits under a broom tree and asks to die: "Enough, Lord!" (1 Kings 19:1-4).

Prayer: Saint Elijah, I entrust to you all who are at the end of their strength, and my own weariness.

Act of the day: Take care of yourself: sleep, rest, accept help.

Day 7: "Get up and eat"

An angel wakes Elijah and gives him bread: "The journey is too long for you." He walks forty days (1 Kings 19:5-8). Christians see in this an image of the Eucharist.

Prayer: Jesus, bread of life, strengthen me for the road ahead.

Act of the day: Go to Mass or make a spiritual communion.

Day 8: The gentle breeze

At Horeb, God is not in the wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but in the sound of a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:9-13).

Prayer: Lord, teach me silence, so that I may hear you speak gently to my heart.

Act of the day: Spend ten minutes in complete silence, without a screen.

Day 9: Elijah's cloak

Before being taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, Elijah leaves his cloak to Elisha, who carries on his mission (2 Kings 2:1-14).

Prayer: Saint Elijah, help me hand on the faith to those who come after me. I place the intention of this novena in God's hands. Amen.

Act of the day: Share with someone younger what helps you believe.

Closing prayer

Saint Elijah, prophet of fire and man of silence, present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Obtain for me your zeal for God and your trust in days of weariness. May I recognize the Lord in the gentle breeze. Saint Elijah, pray for us. Amen.

PILGRIMAGE

Stella Maris Monastery, Mount Carmel

The Stella Maris Monastery in Haifa, Israel, stands at the northwestern tip of Mount Carmel, overlooking the Mediterranean. Mother house of the Discalced Carmelite friars, it is built over a cave that tradition links to the prophet Elijah. The whole of Mount Carmel is bound up with his memory: there he confronted the prophets of Baal, and there, in the twelfth century, the Carmelite Order was born.

Mount Carmel, Elijah's mountain

Carmel, whose name means "garden" or "orchard," is a range of wooded hills stretching some twenty kilometers from the Bay of Haifa toward the southeast. The Bible places there the great confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). In the twelfth century, at the time of the Crusades, Latin hermits settled in a valley of Carmel, near a spring called the "spring of Elijah." Around 1210, Saint Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, gave them a rule: this was the birth of the Carmelite Order, which later spread across Europe.

The Stella Maris Monastery and Elijah's cave

The present monastery was built in the nineteenth century, after earlier buildings were destroyed. Its domed church is dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, honored as "Stella Maris," Star of the Sea. Beneath the high altar, a few steps lead down to a small cave that Carmelite tradition presents as a place of Elijah's prayer. The dome is decorated with paintings showing Elijah taken up in the chariot of fire and other great biblical figures.

- **The Stella Maris church**: the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Elijah's cave beneath the altar.

- **The lighthouse and lookout**: a wide view over the Bay of Haifa and the sea.
- **Elijah's Cave**: at the foot of the cliff, lower down, another cave venerated by Jews, Christians, Muslims and Druze alike.

Muhraqa, the place of the sacrifice

About thirty kilometers to the southeast, on one of the summits of Carmel, the site called Muhraqa ("the place of burning") is traditionally identified as the site of Elijah's sacrifice. A small Carmelite monastery keeps a statue of the prophet brandishing a sword, and its terrace offers a vast view over the Jezreel Valley, as far as Mount Tabor on a clear day.

Praying on Mount Carmel

The Carmelites welcome pilgrims at Stella Maris, where Mass is celebrated daily. July 20, feast of the prophet Elijah, and July 16, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, are the great pilgrimage days, gathering the Christians of Haifa and Galilee. Many pilgrim groups in the Holy Land read the story of Elijah there and pray for the Carmelite family throughout the world.

Practical information

The Stella Maris Monastery is on Stella Maris Road in Haifa, northern Israel. You can reach it by car, by bus, or by the cable car linking the seafront (Bat Galim) to the summit. Muhraqa is reached by car along the Carmel road. Entry to the church is free; modest dress is requested. Times may vary with feasts and the situation in the region: check with the Carmelites or your pilgrimage organizer before you go.

To read the prophet's story, see the page The Prophet Elijah, and pray with the prayer to the prophet Elijah or the novena to the prophet Elijah, from July 11 to 19.

Credits and sources

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