

with a specific endowment from on high, it becomes clear that *Elias* is a composite personage. The expression must be understood to be a name and a title for those whose mission it was to commit keys and powers to men in this final dispensation. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, pp. 170–174.) [*Mormon Doctrine*, page 221; some italics added.]

In summary, then, *Elias* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name *Elijah* and is used in the New Testament to designate Elijah, the prophet of the Old Testament. *Elias* is the name of another man, a prophet of whom we know little. And *Elias* is a title, meaning forerunner, or one who prepares the way.

## PROPHETS “ORDINARY” MEN

It was about 875 years before Christ when the prophet Elijah first strode onto the stage of human history. He is introduced as simply, “Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead.” (1 Kings 17:1.) Some scholars feel he may have been born in Tishbe, a place in Galilee, and that he later went to Gilead, beyond the Jordan, which was then a land of wilderness.

The few details we can glean from the record concerning Elijah’s appearance, what he looks like, call up the word *ordinary*. It was true then, as it is true now, that the prophets were “ordinary men.” Paul of Tarsus, the tent-maker, said it was true in his day, and he used words similar to those of James: “We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.” (Acts 14:15.)

Those references, and there are others we could cite, teach a lesson worth fixing in our minds. The prophets and the Apostles—for Apostles are prophets as well—are not uncommon men either in their backgrounds or in their physical appearance. They come from various walks of life. Some may be short of

stature, others impressively tall, but in general appearance they are like other men.

It is said that we can learn much from history if we will move in our minds from the here and now to the then and there. We realize that the scenery and the costumes change somewhat, but beyond that everything is the same. Some of the past actors in the human drama held different titles, and the social structure of their day was not quite like ours today, but the feelings, the emotions, the relationships, the passions, and particularly the spiritual processes, were the same then as now.

Details mentioned about Elijah describe him in terms that are by no means uncommon. On one occasion the emissaries of the king reported that they had met a man and talked with him. Though they were not given a name, in reporting the encounter they described him as being "an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." (2 Kings 1:8.) The king deduced from that that they had met Elijah. The description fits also the traditional image of John the Baptist (see Mark 1:6), who centuries later became a major participant in the early scenes of the New Testament.

As well as wearing a girdle of skin about his loins, Elijah wore a mantle, a very common article of clothing in that day. Generally it was simply a sheepskin. If rolled tightly, it would form something of a staff. In one moment of great emotion, when Elijah heard the still, small voice, he "wrapped his face in his mantle." (1 Kings 19:13.)

We could extract other details from the Old Testament, but none of them suggests that Elijah was uncommon in appearance, either in stature or in clothing.

I repeat this as a lesson worth learning: The prophets, as they walk and live among men, are common, ordinary men. Men called to apostolic positions are given a people to redeem. Theirs is the responsibility to lead those people in such a way that they

win the battles of life and conquer the ordinary temptations and passions and challenges. And then, speaking figuratively, it is as though these prophets are tapped on the shoulder and reminded: "While you carry such responsibility to help others with their battles, you are not excused from your own challenges of life. You too will be subject to passions, temptations, challenges. Win those battles as best you can."

Some people are somehow dissatisfied to find in the leading servants of the Lord such ordinary mortals. They are disappointed that there is not some obvious mystery about those men; it is almost as if they are looking for the strange and the occult. To me, however, it is a great testimony that the prophets anciently and the prophets today are called out from the ranks of the ordinary men. It should not lessen our faith, for example, to learn that Elijah was discouraged at times, even despondent. (See 1 Kings 19:4.)

This calling forth of ordinary men for extraordinary purposes is as evident during the Savior's earthly mission as in former and later eras. Centuries after Elijah, when Christ called the Twelve, except for them all coming from the same nation they were so diverse that scholars have often commented on the difficulty of welding together into a united, motivated group such totally different individuals drawn from the ranks of the common folk.

## ELIJAH SEALS THE HEAVENS

Elijah first appears in the court of Ahab, the king of Israel. "Ahab," the Old Testament tells us, "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." (1 Kings 16:33.)

Ahab had forsaken the faith of his fathers and had allowed the Northern Kingdom to adopt the worship of calves instead of the God Jehovah. And Ahab, "as if it had been a light thing for