SAMPLE

Ilyas: The Prophet of the Wilderness

and the Challenge of the Mountain The Story of Prophet Ilyas (إلياس)in the Quran and Islamic Tradition

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Introduction

Ilyas (إلياس عليه السلام —) Elijah — is the prophet who stood alone. After the golden age of Dawud and Sulayman, the Israelite kingdom fractured. The northern kingdom of Israel turned to idolatry, worshipping Baal under the influence of a tyrant king and a persistent campaign of false religion. Into this corruption Allah sent Ilyas — a single prophet, without an army, without a kingdom, without any of the temporal power that Dawud and Sulayman had wielded. His only weapon was the truth, and his only ally was Allah.

The Quran mentions Ilyas three times, always briefly, always in lists alongside other prophets. But the brevity of the mention does not reflect the magnitude of the mission. The Quran's description of Ilyas is concentrated: he was a prophet, he was righteous, he called his people to worship Allah alone, and he warned them against the worship of Baal. His story is the story of the prophet who confronts idolatry not with armies but with words — not with power but with persistence.

The Quran connects Ilyas to two other briefly mentioned prophets: Alyasa (Elisha), who was his student and successor, and Dhu'l-Kifl, who is paired with him in the prophetic lists. The three form a cluster of prophets who worked in the period after Sulayman — the period of decline, when the Israelite kingdom was fragmenting and the people were turning from Allah to idols. Ilyas was the first of this cluster — the prophet who began the confrontation with idolatry that would continue through his successors.

Islamic tradition identifies Ilyas with the Elijah of the Israelite tradition — the prophet who confronted King Ahab and the worship of Baal, who was fed by ravens, who challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and who was taken up by Allah in a whirlwind. The Quran does not narrate these events in detail, but it confirms the essential elements: Ilyas was a prophet who called to the worship of Allah alone, his people rejected, and Allah honored him.

This book traces Ilyas's story through the Quran: his prophetic mission, his confrontation with idolatry, his description as righteous, his connection to Alyasa, the tradition that he was taken up by Allah, and the lessons for every person who stands alone for the truth. It is the nineteenth light in the NurOne - The Prophets series — the light that stood against the crowd, the light that refused to worship what the world worshipped, the light that showed that a single person with Allah is a majority.

The Quran's mention of Ilyas is brief but the meaning is deep. In just ten verses of Surah As-Saffat (37:123-132), the Quran presents a complete

prophetic narrative: the commission, the call, the confrontation, the rejection, the exception, and the enduring peace. The compression is the Quran's method — the entire story of a prophet's life distilled into a few verses that contain everything essential and nothing superfluous.

Ilyas's story also connects to a broader Quranic theme: the theme of the prophet who is taken by Allah rather than dying a natural death. Idris was "raised to a high station" (19:57). Ilyas, according to tradition, was taken in a whirlwind. The taking is the Quran's way of showing that the prophet who is rejected by the world is received by Allah — not just honored but physically brought near. The world that would not hear the prophet's voice is replaced by the divine presence that the prophet has been calling others to. The irony is profound: the people who refused to come to Allah through the prophet's invitation are left behind, while the prophet is taken directly.

This book, like others in the NurOne - The Prophets series, takes the Quranic verses as its foundation and builds outward — exploring the meaning of the words, the context of the mission, the scholarly interpretations, the broader themes, and the lessons for contemporary life. The goal is not to add to the Quran but to draw out what the Quran has already placed within its verses. The brevity of the Quranic text is not a deficiency to be remedied; it is a concentration to be unpacked.

The Quran mentions Ilyas in two surahs — Surah As-Saffat and Surah Al-An'am. In Surah As-Saffat, Allah says: "And indeed, Ilyas was among the messengers. When he said to his people: Will you not fear Allah? Do you call upon Baal and leave the best of creators" (37:123-125). The story is brief but pointed. Ilyas was sent to a people who had turned to the worship of Baal, an idol of agricultural fertility. The question he asked cuts to the core of idolatry: you call upon something that cannot create, and you ignore the One who created everything. The Quran does not give an extended narrative of Ilyas's mission. It gives the essence: a prophet, a people, a question, and a choice.

The Quran underscores this of Ilyas: "Peace be upon Ilyas. Indeed, so do We reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants" (37:130-132). Three verses of peace and confirmation. After the confrontation with his people, the Quran does not describe a dramatic destruction or a prolonged conflict. It says: peace. The reward of the prophet is peace. The Quran describes Ilyas as an example of the servant who delivered the message and was honored by his Lord regardless of how the people responded. His story is a reminder that the measure of prophethood is not the size of the audience or the success of the mission by worldly standards, but the faithfulness of the messenger to the One who sent him.

The Quran highlights this further in Surah Al-An'am, placing Ilyas among the righteous: "And Ismail, Alyasa, Yunus, and Lut — and all We preferred over the worlds" (6:86). The verse lists Ilyas alongside other prophets, each with a different mission and a different people, but all sharing a single description: preferred over the worlds. The Quran does not give Ilyas an extended story like Musa or Ibrahim. It gives him a name, a question to his people, and a place among the chosen. The chapters that follow trace every mention of Ilyas in the Quran and examine the historical context of Baal worship, the identity of his people, and the lesson the Quran draws from his mission: that the worship of anything other than the Creator is a rejection that carries consequences, and that the prophet who delivers the warning is honored regardless of whether the warning is heeded.

The Quran provides another angle Ilyas in Surah Al-An'am: "And Ismail, Alyasa, Yunus, and Lut, and each We preferred over the worlds" (6:86). Some scholars identify Ilyas with the biblical Elijah, who confronted the worship of Baal in the northern kingdom of Israel. The Quran does not confirm or deny this identification. It presents Ilyas as a prophet who called his people away from idolatry and toward the worship of the Creator alone. The key lesson the Quran draws from his story is the same lesson it draws from every prophet: the message is always simpler than the people make it.Worship the One who made you.

Do not call upon what cannot create. The people of Ilyas called upon Baal for rain, for crops, for fertility. Ilyas asked: will you call upon something that has no power and ignore the One who has all power? The Quran does not record their answer in words. It records it in the peace given to the prophet: peace be upon Ilyas. The answer of the people is written in the silence that follows.

The Quran's brief treatment of Ilyas raises a question that the text itself answers: why does the Quran mention prophets without giving their full stories? The answer lies in Surah Al-Mu'min: "We have already sent messengers before you. Among them are those We have related to you their stories, and among them are those We have not related to you their stories" (40:78). The Quran gives what is sufficient. It gives Ilyas a question — will you not fear Allah? — and it gives the response: peace be upon him. The space between the question and the peace is filled by the reader's reflection.

The Quran does not narrate the rejection of Ilyas's people in detail because the detail is not the lesson. The lesson is the question, and every person who hears it must answer it for themselves. Ilyas stands in the Quran as a reminder that a prophet's worth is not measured by the length of his narrative but by the truth of the question he was sent to ask. The Quran preserves the

question. The answer belongs to those who hear it across every generation.

The example of Ilyas reveals that the call to worship is never outdated. The idol may change from Baal to wealth, from a statue to a concept, but the call remains: worship the One, leave the rest. The prophet who delivered this call was honored with peace, and the people who ignored it were left to the consequences of their choice.

The Quran says in Surah As-Saffat: Peace be upon Ilyas. Indeed, so do We reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants. These verses are the final word on Ilyas in the Quran. They do not describe the fate of his people. They do not record the response to his message. They record only the peace given to the prophet and the reason for it. He was a doer of good. He was a believing servant. He was given peace. The story of Ilyas in the

Quran begins with a question to his people and ends with peace upon him. What happened in between is known to Allah. What remains for us is the question and the peace. The question is for every generation. The peace is for the one who answers it rightly.

Chapter 1: Ilyas in the Quran

Ilyas (عليه السلام) is mentioned three times in the Quran:

Surah Al-An'am (6:85): "And Zakariya and Yahya and Isa and Ilyas — each was of the righteous."

Surah As-Saffat (37:123-132): The most detailed passage: "Indeed, Ilyas was of the messengers. When he said to his people: Will you not fear? Do you call upon Baal and leave the best of creators — Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers? But they denied him, so they will be brought for punishment, except the devoted servants of Allah. And We left for him among later generations: Peace be upon Ilyas. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants."

Surah Sad (38:48): "And remember Ismail and Alyasa and Dhu'l-Kifl, and all are of the best." (Note: this mention includes Alyasa, not Ilyas directly, but the two are closely connected in tradition.)

The Quran says: "Indeed, Ilyas was of the messengers" (37:123). The word mursalin — messengers — places Ilyas in the highest category of prophethood. He was not just a prophet (nabi); he was a messenger (rasul) — one who was given a specific mission to a specific people. The distinction matters: the messenger is sent with a message, and the message is the standard by which the people are judged. Ilyas was sent with the message of tawhid — the oneness of Allah — to a people who had abandoned it.

In Surah Al-An'am (6:85), Ilyas is listed alongside Zakariya, Yahya, and Isa, and all are described as "of the righteous" — min al-salihin. The word salih — righteous, upright — describes a person whose actions, words, and intentions are all aligned with the truth. Ilyas was not just a prophet with a message; he was a person whose life embodied the message. The righteousness was the credential: the prophet who calls to Allah must himself be of Allah.

The Quran records Ilyas's message:

"When he said to his people: Will you not fear? Do you call upon Baal and leave the best of creators — Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers?" (37:124-126).

The message had three elements:

The call to fear. "Will you not fear?" — a-la tattaqun. The word taqwa — fear, reverence, God-consciousness — is the first step of faith. Ilyas began not with theology but with the call to awareness: fear Allah. whoever fears Allah will not

worship anything else. whoever does not fear Allah will worship everything else.

The rebuke of idolatry. "Do you call upon Baal?" The name Ba'l — Baal — was the name of a Canaanite deity associated with storm, rain, and fertility. The Israelites had adopted the worship of Baal from their Canaanite neighbors, integrating it into their religious life alongside — or instead of — the worship of Allah. Ilyas confronted this directly: you call upon Baal. The prophet did not soften the rebuke; he named the idol and the sin.

The reminder of the true God. "And leave the best of creators — Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers?" The phrase "best of creators" — khayr al-fa'ilin (variant: khayr al-bari'in) — is a superlative: Allah is the best of all who create. The comparison is not that there are other creators; the comparison is rhetorical — Allah is beyond comparison. And the reminder: "your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers." The Israelites' ancestors — Ibrahim, Ishaq, Yaqub, Yusuf, Musa, Dawud, Sulayman — all worshipped Allah. The worship of Baal was not ancestral; it was a departure. Ilyas called them back to the faith of their fathers.

"But they denied him" (37:127). The people rejected Ilyas's message. The verb kadhdhabuhu — they called him a liar, they denied him — is the same verb used for the rejection of Nuh, Hud, Salih, and every prophet whose people turned away. The rejection was not an argument; it was a dismissal. They did not engage with the message; they dismissed the messenger.

The consequence: "so they will be brought for punishment" (37:127, variant).

The rejection had a consequence — not immediate, not theatrical, but certain. The people who denied the messenger would face the judgment. The Quran does not specify the form of the punishment in this verse; it simply states the certainty: denial has consequences.

But there was an exception: "except the devoted servants of Allah" (37:128). Not everyone rejected. Some — the mukhlisin — the sincere, the devoted — did not deny. The exception is the Quran's constant theme: even in the most corrupt society, there are those who remain faithful. The prophet's mission is not measured by the number who accept but by the faithfulness of the few.

"And We left for him among later generations: Peace be upon Ilyas"

(37:129-130).

The Quran's verdict: Ilyas was given peace — salam — that endures across generations. The prophet who was rejected by his generation was honored by every generation after. The peace is not just a greeting; it is a state — the

state of being at peace with Allah, at peace with the truth, at peace with the mission, regardless of the people's response.

"Thus do We reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants" (37:131-132).

The reward: recognition. The doer of good is rewarded with the recognition that lasts. The believing servant — min 'ibadina al-mu'minin — is the title that endures. Ilyas, who had no kingdom, no army, and no followers in his lifetime, was given something greater: the peace of Allah, the recognition of Allah, and the remembrance of every generation.

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Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

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Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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