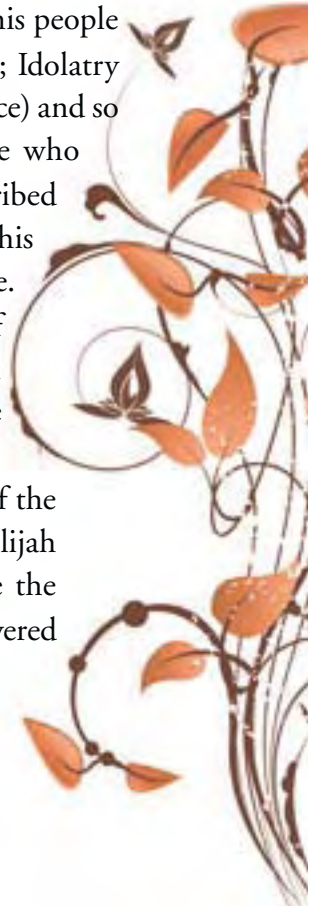




Elijah

A messenger (q.v.) and prophet who is mentioned three times in the Quran. In the first instance the name of Elijah (Ilyas) is cited along with those of Zechariah (q.v.), John (see John the Baptist) and Jesus (q.v.) with the statement that “all were of the righteous” (Q 5:85). The name of Elijah is next mentioned at the beginning of a passage (Q 37: 123 - 32) that recounts his vicissitudes in the manner of other quranic punishment stories (q.v.) involving the prophets and their peoples (see Prophets and Prophethood). There Elijah is identified as one of the messengers, the one who called upon his people not to worship an idol called Bal (see Baal: Idols and Images; Idolatry and Idolaters). His people refused to obey him (see Disobedience) and so he pronounced God’s punishment (see Anger). Only those who followed him survived. In the end of the passage Elijah is described as one of the “believing servants” (Q 37: 32). In a verse from this same passage (Q 37: 130), the name Elijah appears as third time, but in the mysterious orthographic variation Ilyasin instead of the usual form Ilyas. A variant reading proposed by the classical exegetical tradition substitutes the names Ilyas / Ilyasin in the passage with those of Idris/ Idrasin Tabari, Tafsir, xxiii, 96). The extra - canonical Muslim traditions follow the accounts of the Bible (kgs 18 f., see scriptures and the Quran), relating that Elijah was sent from God after the death of Ezekiel (q.v.) because the Israelites had begun worshipping idols such as Bal, who was revered



by the people of the Baalbek and, according to other reportus, had the form of a woman. Elijah's mission, his choice of Elisha (q.v.) as his disciple, together with the rejection of his message by his people and the punishment inflicted upon them by God, which consisted of a three - year drought, are described in great detail. Other traditions, however, attest to the association of the figure of Elijah with the prophet Idris (q.v.) and the mysterious al - Khidr (see Khadir/ Khidr). According to certain exegetes (cf. Suyuti, Durr, vii. 117 - 8), the name Idris could not have been anything but another name for Elijah. while other reports and traditions claimed that Elijah and al - Khidr were the same person, or at least that they were relatives who used to meet annually. The close relationship between these last two is based upon a tradition stating that both of them attained the gift of eternal life (see Eternity) in this world and that they are still alive on earth whereas, in contrast, Jesus and Idris are alive, in heaven (q.v.), Elijah into a semi - angelic being at the conclusion of his mission among his people. God had Elijah dressed in light (q.v.) and removed from him the desire for food and drink. God then made Elijah ascend to heaven on a horse of fire (Umara b. Wathima, Bad al - Khalq, 68).

Arab lexicographers have debated the origin of his name and have concluded that it was taken from the Hebrew, along with other names such as Ishmael (q.v.) and Isaac (q.v.). Yet the Arabic form of the name (Ilyas, bears more similarity to the Christian Greek. Syriac and Ethiopic versions, than to the Hebrew one (see Foreign vocabulary).

In fact, according to Jeffery (for. vocab., 68, the term entered into Arabic form Syriac, as was the case with the name of the idol Bal, quoted in the quranic story of Elijah (q 37: 125).

