

1 Kings 19
February 23, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have any of you been asked by an authority figure (your boss, a military officer, a principal, anyone higher up) to implement a decision or program that would be unpopular or even maddening to another group of people or colleagues? If yes, did you also become their target of their anger, even though you simply “did what you were told to do?” [Let people engage]

Transition: Elijah’s authority was the Lord. And we learned last week that Elijah did what he was told to do. He proved that His God was the one true God, and Baal was not! But he also followed instructions to kill 450 false prophets. What followed was something Elijah didn’t sign up for. Let’s read the text and discover how the story unfolds.

BOOK:

Elijah Flees to Horeb

19 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” ³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵ Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The Lord Appears to Elijah

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹¹ The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹⁵ The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah, to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

The Call of Elisha

¹⁹ So Elijah went from there and found Elisha, son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. ²⁰ Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”

²¹ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Elijah’s discouragement after the victory on Mount Carmel is so much like our moods sometimes are. No one is immune from despair. God is always ready to strengthen us, encourage us, and give us a fresh vision of himself. It may not be spectacular. Listen for the still small voice. Be ready to accept new challenges. Help prepare others to carry on.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Kings 19). Victor Books.

What a contrast we have here to the scene of victory in chapter 18! How often our greatest trials follow our greatest blessings. Here the man of faith gets his eyes off the Lord and becomes a man of fear; yet, in spite of Elijah's failures, God tenderly deals with His servant.

I. God Refreshes Elijah (19:1–8)

James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was “a man of like passions,” a man of clay subject to the same trials and failures as any believer. How strange that Elijah should face 850 angry prophets and not be afraid, and then run away from the threats of one woman! Certainly, there was a physical cause to his failure: the great contest on Mt. Carmel had undoubtedly wearied Elijah and drained him emotionally. Christians would do well to take better care of their bodies, especially after times of intense ministry and sacrifice (cf. Mark 6:31). **But the main cause for Elijah's failure was spiritual: he saw Jezebel and failed to see the Lord; he listened to Jezebel's threats and forgot to wait for God's promises.** In every step he had taken, Elijah had waited for God's command (17:2, 8; 18:1, 36), but now his fear led to impatience, and impatience led to disobedience (Isa. 28:16). He was no longer risking his life for God's glory; rather, he was trying to save his life for his own sake.

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Ps. 37:23), but the steps of an unbelieving and disobedient prophet only led him into worse trouble. Elijah fled to Judah, forgetting that Ahab's daughter was reigning there with Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16–18). He traveled more than eighty miles into greater danger. Wanting to be alone with his dejection, Elijah left his servant there and traveled into the wastelands. It is better for a man to walk with another, for “it is not good for a man to be alone.” Loneliness and despondency usually go together. Physically and emotionally exhausted, Elijah lay down to sleep, and his “bedtime prayer” was, “Take away my life!” Moses had prayed this prayer at a time of great discouragement (Num. 11:15), and so had Jonah (Jonah 4:3). Elijah had his eyes on himself and what he had done (and not done), instead of looking to the Lord.

How graciously God refreshed His servant. The Lord knew that Elijah needed food and rest, as well as spiritual quickening. Elijah ate the meal and then went back to sleep. We see no evidence of repentance or confession of sin; it seems as though he had given up. So, God fed him the second time, and this time Elijah got up and started his journey again. The hand of the Lord guided him to Mt. Horeb, where Moses had received his call from God (Ex. 3) and where the Law had been given. It is encouraging to know that even when the child of God is backslidden and discouraged, God cares for him in grace.

II. God Rebukes Elijah (19:9–18)

The word of God came to him in the cave (v. 9). “What are you doing here?” is a good question to ask ourselves at any time. Elijah's answer again revealed the discouragement of his heart; he felt as though he were the only one in Israel still faithful to the Lord. Instead of confessing his pride and desire for self-vindication, Elijah continued to argue his case with the Lord, so the Lord had to use other means to teach him and to bring him to the place of surrender.

Why did the Lord bring the wind, earthquake, and fire? For one thing, He was teaching his distraught prophet that He has many tools available to do His bidding. God does not lack for obedient servants in all nature (Ps. 148:1–10); yet men, made in the image of God, will not obey Him. What a rebuke this must have been to the backslidden prophet. Furthermore, when the “still small voice” came after the storm, God was showing Elijah that His work is not always done in a big, noisy way. The miracles on Mt. Carmel were wonderful, but the lasting spiritual work in the nation must be accomplished by the Word of God quietly working in the hearts of the people. Elijah wanted something accomplished that was loud and big, but sometimes God prefers that which is still and small. It is not for us to dictate to God what methods He should use. It is our duty only to trust and obey.

“Go, return!” was God’s word to the prophet after he tried to defend himself the second time (vv. 14–15). God would give him another chance to serve by anointing Hazael as the new king of Syria, Jehu as the new king of Israel, and Elisha as the new prophet. God was saying to Elijah: “Stop complaining and grieving over your seeming failures. Get back to work.” This is certainly good counsel.

III. God Replaces Elijah (19:19–21)

It is wonderful the way God encouraged Elijah by assuring him that there were 7,000 faithful believers yet in the land. We wonder where these believers were when Elijah stood alone on Mt. Carmel. We never know how much good our work has done, but God knows, and that is all that matters. Elijah’s ministry was drawing to a close; he was to select his successor and prepare him for the continued work of proclaiming the Word of God. This too was an encouragement to Elijah, for now he knew that his work would continue even after his departure. There is a practical lesson for us here: if we will but wait for the Lord’s message from His Word, and will not run away, He will give us the encouragement we need.

Elijah’s first step was to appoint Elisha as his successor. This he did by casting his mantle (or cloak) about Elisha as Elisha was plowing in the fields. This act symbolized the fact that Elisha would now be a prophet with the same power and authority of Elijah. Elisha desired to bid farewell to his loved ones, and this was permitted, although in most homes such farewells would have taken several days to complete. See Luke 9:61–62. **When God has called us, it is important that we follow immediately and not put others ahead of him.**

The fact that Elisha slew the oxen and used the tools for his firewood indicates how definitely he was breaking with the past. He was “burning his bridges behind him” so to speak. The feast involved the friends of the neighborhood as well as Elisha’s family; they all came to wish him well in his new calling. But once the feast was over, Elisha arose and followed his master and ministered to him. Elijah did not anoint Hazael; Elisha did this later on (2 Kings 8:8–15). It was also Elisha who anointed Jehu (2 Kings 9:1–10). However, inasmuch as Elijah anointed Elisha, he indirectly anointed the others.

The fact that Elisha was assisted in the plowing by eleven other men (probably his father’s servants, v. 19) suggests that Elisha came from a wealthy family. **Have you noticed in the Bible that God usually calls people who are busy? Moses was caring for the sheep; Gideon was threshing wheat; Peter, James, and John were busy in their fishing business; Nehemiah was**

cupbearer to the king. God has no place for lazy people. For Elisha to give up his family and home, and the wealth he would have inherited, was certainly an act of faith and surrender. Elisha stayed in the background until Elijah's ascension (2 Kings 2), at which time he took up the ministry. Elijah's ministry had been that of "the earthquake, the fire, and the wind"; but Elisha would minister as "the still small voice." Of course, there would be judgments in his ministry as well, since sin must always be judged.

This experience in the life of Elijah is a good warning against despondency and discouragement. Just about the time we feel we have accomplished nothing, God reveals that He has used us more than we realized. It is a dangerous thing to think we are the only ones holding to the truth. Of course, it would have been better had the 7,000 "hidden ones" taken their stand with the prophet. It is likely that Elijah's bitter attitude shortened his ministry. The best solution for discouragement is Isa. 40:31—waiting upon the Lord.

Constable, C.L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 527-529) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3. Ahab's wicked wife (chap. 19)

a. *Elijah's flight (19:1-8)*

19:1-5a. Jezebel had not been present on Mount Carmel; her husband reported to her what had taken place. Infuriated by Elijah's treatment of her prophets ... Jezebel sent a message to him. He was evidently still in the city of Jezreel as she was (cf. 18:46) when he received her warning. She threatened to take his life in 24 hours in retaliation for his slaughtering the 450 Baal prophets.

It is remarkable that her threat terrified Elijah as it did. Ironically by contrast he had told the widow in Zarephath not to be afraid (17:13). He had just demonstrated that the gods to whom she now appealed in her curse had no power at all. (Her statement that she was willing to be dealt with severely by the gods [cf. 2:23; 20:10; 2 Kings 6:31] points up the seriousness of her threat. She was so certain she would kill Elijah that she willingly put her own welfare "on the line.") Evidently Elijah's fear sprang from the power Jezebel possessed. Rather than resting in God for His protection as he had for the past three and one-half years, Elijah ran for his life. He ran all the way through the kingdom of Judah to the southernmost town in the land, Beersheba. Still fearful he might be discovered by Jezebel's spies he told his servant to stay behind, and he traveled alone one more day's journey (about 15 miles) into the Negev desert. Finally, he sat down under a broom tree (a desert bush that grows to a height of 12 feet and provides some, though not much, shade) and rested. He was so discouraged he prayed that he might die. Elijah had forgotten the lessons God had been teaching him at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel. His eyes were on his circumstances rather than on the Lord. His statement that he was no better than his ancestors (19:4) suggests that he was no more successful than his forefathers in ousting Baal-worship from Israel. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah lay down ... and fell asleep.

19:5b–8. Elijah woke at the touch of a divinely sent messenger. This **angel** had prepared freshly baked **bread**, still warm, and plenty of **water**, which he invited Elijah to consume. The prophet did so and then returned to his rest. **The angel** probably appeared as a human being as was common in the Old Testament.

Again, the angel woke Elijah, perhaps after he had slept for some time, and urged him to **eat** more food since **the journey** before him would require **much** energy. Moses and the Israelites had traveled in that wilderness for 40 years, sustained by the manna God had provided for them and learned lessons of His faithful care and provision. Now Elijah would traverse the same desert for 40 days and ... nights, sustained by the bread God provided and would learn the same lessons. A direct trip from Beersheba to Mount **Horeb** (the ancient name for Mount Sinai; cf. Ex. 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; Deut. 5:2; 1 Kings 8:9; Ps. 106:19; Mal. 4:4) would have taken Elijah only about 14 days on foot (a distance of approx 200 miles). God was reminding him and teaching him during those 40 days and nights. Finally, He went to **the mountain of God**, the very place where God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and where He had entered into a covenant with His Chosen People.

b. Elijah's revelation (19:9–18)

19:9–10. Arriving at one of the mountains in the Sinai range Elijah found a **cave** and took refuge in it. There he received a revelation from God. **The Lord** began this lesson with the question, **What are you doing here, Elijah?** (cf. v. 13; Gen. 3:9) God had not sent him here as He had directed him to other places (cf. 1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1). Elijah had run out because of fear (19:3). Elijah's response revealed that he felt he was standing completely alone and defenseless against the ungodly forces that threatened to overpower him (cf. v. 14). Of course, he knew that he was not **the only one left** of all the faithful remnant (cf. 18:13), but he felt all alone. Interestingly, Elijah spoke only of the Lord's **prophets** being killed (cf. 18:13a); he made no mention of Baal's 450 prophets who were killed. Fear and discouragement caused him to see only the dark side. He sensed failure in spite of his being **zealous**. Mercifully, God did not lecture Elijah or chasten His chafed prophet. God simply gave him a demonstration of His ways.

19:11–14. Standing on the mountainside outside his cave (cf. v. 9) Elijah witnessed what Moses had seen in those mountains centuries before (Ex. 19:16–18) and what he himself had seen on Mount Carmel only a few days earlier (1 Kings 18:38, 45), namely, a spectacular demonstration of the power of God, this time in **wind**, an **earthquake**, and **fire**. But on this occasion **the Lord was not in** any of these, that is, they were not His instruments of self-revelation. Evidently some time later when Elijah was back in his cave (19:13) he **heard** the sound of a **gentle whisper**. Recognizing this as a revelation of God he **pulled his cloak over part of his face**, walked **out to the mouth of the cave**, and **stood** there waiting for God to act. God asked the same question He asked earlier (cf. v. 9): **What are you doing here, Elijah?** The prophet's response was identical to his first reply (cf. v. 10), suggesting that even though he may have understood the point of God's display of natural forces for his benefit he still felt the same way about himself.

The message God seems to have intended for Elijah is that whereas He had revealed Himself in spectacular demonstrations of His power in the past at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel, He would

now use Elijah in gentler, less dramatic ways. These ways God proceeded to explain to His servant (vv. 15–18). God would deal with Elijah’s personal feelings about himself later in a gentle way too.

19:15–17. The Lord told Elijah to leave there, to **go back the way he came** (i.e., through Israel) to **Damascus**. (Cf. God’s commands “leave” and “go” to Elijah in 17:3, 9; 18:1; 21:18; 2 Kings 1:3, 15.) The Lord then gave him three assignments: to **anoint Hazael king** of the Arameans in Damascus (see the chart “Kings of Aram in 1 and 2 Kings,” near 1 Kings 11:23–25), to **anoint Jehu ... king of Israel**, and to **anoint Elisha ... from Abel Meholah** (cf. Jud. 7:22) as his own successor. Through these three men God would complete the purge of Baal worship that Elijah had begun. Actually, Elijah did only the last of these three directly, but he did the other two indirectly through Elisha, his *protégé*. Elisha was involved, though strangely, in Hazael’s becoming Aram’s king (2 Kings 8:7–14) and one of Elisha’s associates anointed Jehu (2 Kings 9:1–3).

19:18. God then revealed to Elijah that He had preserved **7,000** faithful followers **in Israel** who had **not bowed** before or **kissed** the emblems of idolatry in worship. Such news undoubtedly cheered Elijah. Were it not for the insight into his feelings of fear and discouragement given in this chapter, one might not believe that Elijah was indeed “a man just like us” (James 5:17).

c. Elijah’s successor (19:19–21)

19:19–20. Elijah returned from the Sinai peninsula to find **Elisha** (whose name means “My God is salvation”) near his hometown of Abel Meholah (v. 16) in the Jordan Valley about halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Kinnereth in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elisha evidently came from a family that owned lots of land (as implied by the **12** yoke of oxen). **He** himself **was plowing** when Elijah **found** him. Throwing a prophet’s **cloak around** a person symbolized the passing of the power and authority of the office to that individual. That **Elisha** realized the meaning of this act is obvious from his reaction. Immediately he started to abandon his former occupation and follow **Elijah**. **Elijah** gave him permission to say farewell to his family. The unusual reply, **What have I done to you?** is an idiom meaning, “Do as you please” or “What have I done to stop you?”

19:21. **Elisha** sealed his decision by slaughtering **his yoke of oxen** and burning his **plowing** implements. He evidently hosted a farewell banquet, serving his sacrificed animals to his guests for supper. **Then he set out to** accompany **Elijah** as **his attendant**.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 143). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Elijah Hides at Horeb (19:1–21). Elijah’s victory, however, turned into fear and depression. Surprisingly, Jezebel was not intimidated by Ahab’s report of Elijah’s deeds. She vowed to kill the prophet, who ran again, but this time away from Jezebel to the desert. In despair the prophet prayed to die (see Num. 11:11–15; Job 6:8–9; Jon. 4:8). The angel of the Lord strengthened him with food, and he journeyed forty days and nights to a cave at Mount Horeb. It was upon the

same Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai, that the Lord had revealed Himself to Moses (see Exod. 3; 19).

Elijah complained that the Israelites had abandoned God and that he was the last prophet of the Lord. But Elijah was mistaken. God brought in succession a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire to ravage the mountain. But the prophet did not hear God in these events. Instead, Elijah heard the Lord in a small whisper. By this the prophet learned that sometimes God works in quiet ways. There were in fact seven thousand who had not worshiped Baal. God sent Elijah to anoint three men who would ultimately destroy Ahab's house—Hazeal of Aram, Jehu of Israel, and the prophet Elisha. The call of Elisha was the beginning of a large school of prophets (see 2 Kgs. 6:1–2).

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 1 Kings. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 204-205). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Elijah's Vision at Horeb (1 Kings 19:1–21)

The passage—When Ahab told Jezebel what Elijah had done on Mount Carmel, she swore to kill him. He fled to Beersheba and hid. He was so discouraged he wanted to die. God sent an angel to give him food to strengthen him. He went on to a cave in Mount Horeb. God asked him why he was there. He replied that he was the only one left who was true to God. There was a great storm that tore through the mountain, but God was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but God was not in it. After the earthquake there was a fire. God was not in it either. Then God spoke in a “still small voice.” God told Elijah to anoint Hazeal to be king over Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and to anoint Elisha to succeed him as God's prophet. God revealed to him that there were 7,000 others in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal. Soon Elijah found Elisha and carried out God's directions as he anointed him as a prophet. He cast his prophet's cloak on him symbolizing the transfer of the prophetic ministry.

Special points—Why was Elisha allowed to go back to his home for a farewell with his family when Jesus seemed to denounce this sort of thing in Luke 9:61–62? The circumstances were different. Elisha had already accepted the will of God for his life. He was not postponing a decision. What Jesus was urging was immediate decision. Excuses to delay doing the will of God are never acceptable. The feast of Elisha was a celebration of his dedication of himself to God. His parents shared his joy in finding God's purpose for his life.

Truth for today—Elijah's discouragement after the victory on Mount Carmel is so much like our moods sometimes are. No one is immune from despair. God is always ready to strengthen us, encourage us, and give us a fresh vision of himself. It may not be spectacular. Listen for the still small voice. Be ready to accept new challenges. Help prepare others to carry on.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Kings 19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.