

Traveling with Elijah

Seven lessons from the life of Elijah



Created by
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Lesson Four:

Depression

1 Kings 19:1-21

1. Biblical text

Elijah Flees Jezebel

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the

journey is too great for you." 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

The Lord Speaks to Elijah

9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of

a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 15 And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from

the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

The Call of Elisha

19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

21 And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

2. Meaning of the story

2.1 Unbelief in spite of miracles (1 Kings 19:1,2)

Immediately after God sent fire from heaven and after the priests of Baal were killed, King Ahab gave a precise description to Queen Jezebel of everything that had happened. Jezebel's attitude and her belief in 'her' Melkart were not changed by her husband's testimony. The amazing miracle had no impact.

Queen Jezebel sent a message to Elijah, warning him that she would kill him within 24 hours. In her anger Jezebel called upon the Baals to kill her if she did not take revenge on Elijah for having slain their priests.



QUESTIONS:

- Why would Queen Jezebel not have drawn the only correct conclusion from the miracles, and repented to serve God?
- Do miracles strengthen your own faith?

2.2 Depression in spite of providence (1 Kings 19:3-10)

No wonder Elijah ran for his life! The source of all trouble in Israel was still unrepentant and wanted to kill him. King Ahab was either unwilling or unable to restrain his wife.

Elijah went to Beersheba, in the southern desert of Judah, beyond Jezebel's grasp. He continued deeper into the desert, and prayed under a broom tree [Picture 1] that God would allow him to die. That is a strange prayer for someone who just experienced a great miracle and who was helped by God to escape from a murderess. After this prayer Elijah slept a bit.



[Picture 1, broom tree]

Elijah did not react rationally; he was probably depressed. Even God's provision of food through an angel did not lift up his spirit. He proceeded to Mount Sinai, ready to die in that holy place. There is no indication that God told Elijah to go to Sinai. The question in verse 9b implies that God did not want Elijah to be there. There was probably symbolic meaning in Elijah's decision to go to Mount Sinai. That was the place where God's covenant with Israel began, and it was where he thought it would end. [Picture 2]



QUESTIONS:

- Why was Elijah depressed? (1 Kings 19:4, 10)
- Do you have times of depression? (See Matthew 11:28-29, 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, 7:5-7)

2.3 *Threefold comfort (1 Kings 19:11-21)*

God lifted Elijah's spirit up, by revealing Himself. Elijah did not meet God in the mighty wind, neither in the earthquake, nor in the fire. Many explanations have been given for these powers of nature. We should not try to read more into it than "God speaks not in outward symbols, but through His presence



[Picture 2, Mount Sinai]

in His living Word", as one commentator says. Elijah recognized God's presence in His speech. The Word of God is Elijah's consolation, especially His word of the covenant with Israel. It is doubtful that Elijah understood this, however. Elijah gave exactly the same negative answer to God as he did before God's Self-revelation.

In order to get Elijah out of his state of mind, God not only gave him his Word, but he also gave him work to do. He was sent into the world with a mission. Elijah looks like a 'second Moses'. (See verses 8,10,11,13,15-16). The first Moses gave God's covenant to the people, the second Moses calls the people back to this covenant.

In the first place, God forced Elijah to face his problems rather than run away from them. Elijah would go back exactly the same way he had come.

Then Elijah was to anoint some people as kings over Aram and Israel. The word 'anoint' seems to mean 'designate as divinely appointed'. The actual anointing happened much later, (See 2 Kings 8:7-15 and 9:1-16) In this way Elijah became involved in God's plans with the world and His people.

God even gave Elijah insight into His future work of cleansing the nation of Israel from sinners. Jezebel and her followers were to perish by the sword of Jehu. The last victory would be for those faithful to God.

God does not cancel his covenant promises, but specifies them. Even if not the whole nation obeys, His plans continue through the chosen few, eventually through the Chosen One. (See Romans 11:4)



QUESTIONS:

- How do you think the promise of a small remnant of a few thousand, could be a comfort to Elijah? (See 1 Kings 19:10,14)
- Share an experience of how God helped you cope with depression by His Word or by giving you something to do.

Besides pointing Elijah to His Word and giving him a job to do, God also conformed Elijah with a partner in ministry. Elisha was part of God's answer to Elijah's complaint that he was all alone.

Elisha must have come from a very wealthy family, as he had 12 pairs of oxen. Initially Elijah refused to let Elisha follow him, even though he knew God wanted him to anoint Elisha to be a prophet. Only after Elisha broke completely with his past, Elijah allowed him to become his attendant.



QUESTIONS:

- In what sense do we have, like Elijah, to make a 'clean cut' in order to serve God? (See Acts 2:37-41, 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10)
- Do you have people around you who can help you cope with being down or depressed when that occurs to you?

