



Lessons from Elijah's Life

Discouraged after Victory

Date: 18 March 2020

Text: 1 Kings 19:1-4

Key Lesson: Beware! The Devil often attacks after a victory.

The Evening of Victory Day

That afternoon, Elijah had won the victory, or rather God had. God had sent fire from heaven that devoured Elijah's sacrifice, the wood, the altar and the water. The people returned their loyalty to Jehovah. They killed the 450 prophets of Baal. God answered Elijah's prayer and sent a downpour of rain. God gave Elijah strength to run before Ahab unto Jezreel. Ahab did not put up the victorious prophet in the Grand Hotel in Jezreel that evening. Instead, he left Elijah at the entrance of the city to fend for himself. What a day! Elijah was exhausted.

Ahab Reported to Jezebel

Jezebel, who remained at home in Jezreel, may have seen the fire fall from heaven and then the tremendous rainstorm. She may have assumed that her god Baal and finally prevailed. If so, her thoughts were soon to change.

Upon entering the palace, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done (1Ki 19:1). Like a typical media reporter, he only told her the part of the story that he knew would excite her emotions. To keep her devilish wrath from focusing on his weak leadership, he placed all the blame for the day's failure on Elijah. He told her of Elijah's contest, of how he mocked her prophets, of how he prayed fired from heaven when her god had failed. He related that all the people had turned back to Jehovah and proclaimed Him the true God. He then gave her a graphic report of how Elijah had slain **all** the prophets of Baal with the sword. He noted that Elijah had then prayed and the rain came down. His report gave no glory to the Lord for sending fire down from heaven. He gave no praise to God for sending rain in abundance. Like all of his people, Ahab should have humbled himself, repented and turned back to Jehovah. Instead, his hard heart continued in the path of rebellion.

Certainly, Ahab knew that losing the contest, the people returning to Jehovah, and the death of all her prophets would put her in a rage. "Jezebel wore the crown in that castle! She was the boss; he was her puppet!"¹ Because he was a weak, milquetoast, yes-man husband, he worded his report to make sure that Jezebel aimed her sword at Elijah and not at himself. This he succeeded to do.

Jezebel's Threat

The people had agreed on the terms of the contest. Elijah won the contest fairly. The prophets of Baal had utterly failed. Elijah had prayed and God sent rain. Ahab witnessed all this. If Elijah deserved punishment, Ahab was the one who should have performed it. However, in his heart Ahab knew that Elijah had done no wrong.

Upon hearing Ahab's carefully worded report of the day, as expected, Jezebel exploded in a rage. She may have denounced Ahab's weakness with her sharp tongue, but she aimed her vengeance at Elijah. She sent a messenger to Elijah with an execution threat (1Ki 19:2). She was not the king. It was not her job to punish Elijah if that was needed. Yet she "wore the pants" in the family. She ruled the roost and Ahab dare not interfere. Her word was law.

Ladies, you must guard against any temptation to rule your husband. God has placed him in the position of leadership in your home. If he fails to lead your home biblically, he will answer to God for that. You have no biblical right to step up and take the leadership. God gave him the role of loving leader in your home. God gave you the role of being a submissive completer for your husband. If your husband is not living up to his role, then beg God to help you become a more submissive completer and pray that God will help your husband. Undermining him or siding against his decisions will exasperate the problem and break your fellowship with God (Ps 66:18). Then God will not hear your prayers and your problems will escalate.

Elijah's Humanity

Pastor Alan Carr introduced his sermon on 1 Kings 19:1-4 with these words about Elijah. "In chapter 17, we saw his **humility**. In chapter 18, we saw his **heroism**. In chapter 19, we are confronted with his **humanity**. We are given startling evidence of this by the words James used concerning Elijah, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are", James 5:17."²

¹ Pastor Alan Carr, https://www.sermonnotebook.org/elijah/1%20Kings%2019_1-4.htm

² Ibid.

Elijah entered into a period that plunged him to the depths of discouragement. He was physically and emotionally exhausted after the events of the day. Many great men in history struggled with discouragement including Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, and Charles Spurgeon. Pastor Carr adds this helpful note. "Of course, not all depression is bad. Depression is the body's natural reaction to shock. When a time of grief, stress, frustration, or illness occurs, the brain will release chemicals that will serve to numb the mind and body. This is like a shock absorber. However, there are times when the brain and its chemicals become so out of balance that clinical depression may occur. Professionals say that a period of depression lasting over 2 weeks should be considered serious and needs treatment."³

When Elijah saw the message from Jezebel, he arose and went for his life (1Ki 19:3). On the one hand, this seems odd. Up to this point, Elijah appeared to be a fearless prophet. God miraculously fed him by the brook for several weeks or months. God took him safely to the town of Zarephath where the Lord sustained him, the widow and her son for three years during the drought. God gave him boldness to face Ahab and present his contest. With just a short prayer, he prayed down fire from heaven that was powerful. In answer to fervent prayer, God sent an abundant rain. God then gave him strength to run the entire distance to Jezreel in the rain. He was a mighty man of God. On the other hand, what Elijah did was very human. He was exhausted. He just had a great victory. Now the devil used Jezebel to threaten his life. Evidently, without praying, Elijah responded in the flesh, fleeing in fear. He acted irrationally. When we become frightened or discouraged, we too may act irrationally. We may not think normally. We may focus on the "what if" possibilities. We may do things that are illogical, though they may seem like the best options to us.

Elijah's Hiding Place

During the previous three and a half years, when God hid Elijah, He hid him in the local area. His hiding place near the brook was a bit southwest of Jezreel. His hiding place with the widow was northeast of Jezreel in Jezebel's homeland. God kept him hidden and perfectly safe in both of these hiding places because he trusted God. In his discouragement and failure to trust God, he fled to the southern end of Judah and then another days' journey into the wilderness (1Ki 19:3). Even there, he did not feel safe.

He sat down under a juniper tree. This was a bushy shrub about 2-3 metres tall, abundant in the desert of Sinai. Natives to the area occasionally ate the bitter roots and used the wood to make an excellent charcoal (Job 30:4).

Elijah's Despair

There in that lonely, hot, dry location, Elijah desired to die. What a contradiction! If he truly wanted to die, he could have stayed in Jezreel. He did not really want to die. He wanted pity. He longed for encouragement. He then said, "It is enough". He felt he had had enough of running and hiding. He asked God to take his life since he was no better than his forefathers who had died. He was not thinking at all rationally. When we are down, discouraged or fearful it is no time to be making major decisions.

How did Elijah get himself in such a state of despair? "Elijah was now walking by sight and not by faith."⁴

- 1) Elijah cut himself off from those close to him (1Ki 19:3).
- 2) Elijah took his eyes off the Lord and focused instead on his own circumstances (1Ki 19:3).
- 3) He stopped interceding for others and started requesting for himself (1Ki 19:4).
- 4) Elijah adopted an attitude that said, "Life is hopeless." (1Ki 19:4).
- 5) Elijah claimed that he wanted to die (1Ki 19:4).⁵

Each of those five poor choices led Elijah to discouragement and then to despair. Jim Berg defines despair as "sorrow without hope." Elijah was very tired (1Ki 18:46). He should have found a place of hiding where he could rest. He needed the companionship of his servant for encouragement. He should not have left him behind. As he had done in earlier days, he should have got on his knees and prayed for protection and wisdom. He should have kept his focus on caring for others instead of worrying about himself. That is difficult to do when we are tired, scared and discouraged. He did not truly want to die, that is why he is running from Jezebel. What he needed most was lots of rest, encouragement, prayer, and meditation on God's promises. That is what we also need when we get discouraged, fearful and begin to despair.

(Psalms 34:17) "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." (Psalms 34:18) "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psalms 27:14) "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." (Psalms 37:7) "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass." (Psalms 37:23-24) "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand." (Proverbs 3:5-6) "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (1 Peter 5:7) "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

³ Ibid.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*.

⁵ Pastor Alan Carr