

1 Kings 19 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

XIII. Ahab (Israel) • 16:29-22:40

A. Ahab's Wickedness • 16:29-34

B. Elijah's Career • Chs. 17-19

1. He proclaims drought • 17:1-7

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Some people are *irrepressible optimists*.

No matter how dark the clouds, they're able to find the silver lining.

No matter how desperate the situation, they're rejoicing in the opportunities they see.

On the other end of the spectrum are those *persistent pessimists*.

It doesn't matter how sunny the sky, they know tragedy lurks just over the horizon.

Comedian *Woody Allen* comes from this later group or pessimists.

He once said, "More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness; the other to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

Allen is one of those modern people who live in a perpetual state of anxiety & depression.

There's an *epidemic of despair* today.

Depression is the #1 cause for professional counseling.

Anti-depressants are among the most commonly prescribed drugs.

Despite all the therapy & drugs, the tide of depression keeps growing.

Tonite we're going to take a look at a classic case of depression as we continue our study in 1 Kings.

This passage has a lot to teach us about depression & its cure.

5. Elijah's flight • 19:1-18

a. Jezebel's threat • vs. 1-3

1

The city of Jezreel was a little less than 20 miles from Mt. Carmel where Elijah's showdown with Baal had taken place.

It was the location of Ahab's Summer palace & his wicked wife Jezebel had remained there when he went off to meet the prophet of God.

Now, what would Jezebel be thinking?

The 3½ year long drought came about as a result of Elijah's announcement of *Yahweh's judgment* on Israel for turning to the idols of Baal & Asherah.

Baal was the god of weather Jezebel had imported from her native home in Phoenicia.

Now that the rains are falling, it must mean Elijah & his god Yahweh have been defeated & Baal is once more giving the rain.

Ahab's chariot is delayed in its trip from Carmel back to Jezreel by the muddy roads, allowing Elijah to run there on foot more quickly.

When he arrives he slips into the city quietly and lodges with a friend.

Then Ahab arrives & goes to Jezebel with news very different from what she expected.

It wasn't Elijah & Yahweh who'd been defeated – it was Baal who'd lost the contest & Jezebel's 450 hand-picked priests were fish food.

2

Jezebel was furious! Beyond angry!

Her long campaign of eradicating Israel's worship of Yahweh had been just about complete.

She'd installed the worship of the Phoenician gods and had a huge religious institution going, supported by the 450 prophets of Baal.

In a single afternoon, her elaborate plan unraveled and suffered a set-back she knew she might never recover from.

She was beside herself & determined there was only one way to make herself feel better, attack the cause of her distress – the man of God, Elijah – her nemesis.

So she sent a messenger with a warning; sometime in the next 24

hours, she'd kill him!

Being the great man of faith he was, Elijah laughed off her threat.

I mean – he's just stood as a lone man before the entire nation.

He's just defeated & executed 450 powerful men, the official representatives of the god of war, who's symbol is the lightning bolt.

Elijah is the guy who calls down fire from heaven!

What's the threat of a *lone woman* mean to him?

Apparently, it means a lot -

3

Jezebel is in the north, Beersheba was 90 miles away in the extreme south.

Question: Why did Jezebel *threaten* Elijah? Why not just send an assassin & be done with him?

She was smart!

Ahab's report made it clear the people were backing the man of God. He as their hero.

Killing him now would only make a martyr who would continue to fuel the fires of religious revival long after he was gone.

And it would mean a popular uprising against both her & Ahab that would sweep them from the throne.

So being adept at politics & an astute observer of human nature, she wisely took the route of sending a threat.

Her aim was to get Elijah to *run* away in fear, thereby *discrediting him* before the people he'd just impressed with his faith & courage.

If the new revival could be made leaderless in this way, the people could be quickly turned *back* to Baal

It's human nature to follow a leader.

God provides for this need in the church by giving leaders - apostles, prophets, & pastors.

At the same time, the enemy twists this need to his purposes in 2 ways –

1) He *perverts* the natural leadership abilities of some people to *destructive* ends.

2) He seeks to *defile & discredit* godly leaders so that those they lead become discouraged & turn away.

So many well known Christian leaders have fallen in the recent past,

it's gotten to the point today where we've become a bit *jaded* about leaders, *leery* of them.

It's like we *expect* them to let us down.

Many are *cynical* of anyone who comes across as strong or assured of their leadership.

When we were in Germany not long ago, we learned that in the churches there, leaders have to be careful about being assertive because most older Germans are still reeling from Hitler.

Because Jezebel was a Satanic ambassador, we can learn much about the enemy's tactics from her.

We see a huge lesson here – Fear is a major tool of the devil.

She didn't send an assassin; she could have.

No, she sent a message that was calculated to do one thing, spook Elijah and get him to run away.

She attacked him at the point of his greatest strength – faith!

Because he'd just had a monumental victory in this area, he wasn't on guard over it.

He was totally unprepared for this challenge.

The warrior had taken off his armor & the fiery dart of doubt struck home.

Instead of staying & prayerfully reasoning it out, he bolted.

He let the lie of fear burn away his trust in God.

Mark it well my friends, this is the beginning of Elijah's trouble.

This is where his battle with depression begins – with a lie he *simply chooses* to hold on to rather than reject.

He jumps up, grabs his servant, & they dash as fast as they can the 90 miles south to Beersheba, Israel's southernmost settlement.

Keep in mind he's already just run 20 miles from Carmel to Jezreel.

b. into the wilderness • vs. 4-10

4

Leaving his servant in Beersheba, Elijah went another 15 to 20 miles into the southern desert, then collapsed under a tree.

So, in about 5 days, he's gone some 130 miles.

And that 5 days of running from Jezebel have worked that lie even deeper into his soul.

It's a festering wound of fear that brought him to despair.

The enemy's lie has stolen his hope & trust in God.

There's nothing left for him than to ask that God kill him.
He's so depressed he sees *no difference* between himself & the
godless among whom he lives.

His mood has gone from blue to black!

Note carefully where Elijah is looking? Is he looking to the Lord or at
himself?

He's consumed with himself; with his inability,
his failure,
his fear,
his foolishness.

You see, this is the great danger of our Mt. Carmel victories – they're
won because at *that moment* we know it's *not us* but God Who's
at work.

But a short time later, the flesh tries to salvage some little fleeting
bit of glory for itself & says, "Well, yes, God did it – but He
did it *through me*. And He did it through me because I'm
better than others."

Self climbs once more onto the pedestal.

What makes it doubly damning is when after a great victory we
pride ourselves on how humble we are about it all and how
we continue to deflect the glory to God.

"Don't look at me; I'm nothing special – it's all God!"

But inwardly we're thinking – "Good job, boyee! Man, you
sure are something; able to be used by God so
powerfully, then stay so humble. Other people *wish* they
could be like you!"

Then the devil fires off one of his fiery darts & the lie strikes home.

That boastful self is slapped across the face with the realization it
was doing the very thing it prided itself against!

And the enemy is right there to compound the deceit by trashing
our identity in Christ, denying the new person the Spirit of God
is making us in to.

All that God has done *in* us,
for us, and
through us is eclipsed by a false sense of
failure.

The enemy's strategy is to get us so pre-occupied with self, either our
success or failure, we lose sight of God.

And notice here, Elijah is all alone. He left his servant in Beersheba. It's common in depression to isolate yourself.

The lies that produce depression push us away from others. Other people can give us important counsel that will dispel the darkness, so the enemy puts it in our heads that no one cares or that we need to deal with this ourselves.

“This is *your* thing. Don't burden them with your goo. Just because you're bummed out, they don't have to be too. You're not much fun to be around right now & they don't want to hear about it – so, for their sakes, can it & get away. They don't understand & even more *they don't care*.

Because they don't care, you have a *right* to feel the way you do.

Your life sucks & it's never going to be any different. Maybe God isn't real, and if He *is* He obviously doesn't care because → look at you!

The world would be better off if you weren't around to mess it up!”

Now, as I say all that – you have 1 of 2 reactions –

- 1) “How did you know?” Because you've thought those *exact same things*.
- 2) “That's horrible!” Because you haven't **YET** thought those exact same things. Chances are, you will.

Folks, listen this is what Elijah was going through because it's common to human experience & condition & God wants us to know *how to deal with it* when it happens.

5-7

Note that when God sets out to deliver His man from depression, He doesn't slap him upside the head.

There's no rebuke here.

Elijah's depression *began with a lie*, but it's now *complicated* by 2 sources of exhaustion –

One *physical*, the other *emotional*.

Before God can deal with the spiritual root of Elijah's depression, He must first take care of the physical & soul problems.

1st - Elijah was Physically Exhausted

It all began when he ran 20 miles from Carmel to Jezreel

Then, after Jezebel's threat, he ran another 110 miles into the wilderness.

By the time he arrived in the wasteland, he was completely drained.

His physical strength was gone; he had nothing left.

The famous coach Vince Lombardi once said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all."

2nd - He Was Emotionally Exhausted

Think about all Elijah's been through over the last 5 years.

It began with his increasing distress over Israel's growing apostasy under Ahab & Jezebel.

He bursts on to the scene by marching boldly into Ahab's palace & announcing a record drought.

He spends the next 3½ years hiding out from Ahab's spies who're searching everywhere for him to kill him as the cause of Israel's distress.

Then, he stood alone against the entire nation at Carmel.

In one climactic & dramatic moment, it all came to a head when he called down fire from heaven.

There was the exhilaration of seeing the nation repent as they declared their loyalty to Yahweh & seized the prophets of Baal.

But then his hopes were dashed with Jezebel's threat.

Where was God? Why didn't He silence the witch?

So he ran & ran & ran some more.

Elijah has been living with massive stress & on the *adrenaline* it produces *for years!*

When you compound a spiritual lie with physical & emotional exhaustion, you get depression.

Much depression *today* comes from the same root cause.

Notice how God dealt with Elijah

Because Elijah was physically exhausted, the Lord let him rest.

Psalm 127:2 says - [God] gives His beloved sleep.

Regular, solid rest is an important part of maintaining both physical & emotional health.

Elijah was also weak from a lack of food, so God made him a meal.

He ate the cake, drank the water, and went back to sleep.

A 2nd time the angel awoke him, & again Elijah ate & drank. All this restored Elijah's *physical* strength, a *prerequisite* to restoring him *emotionally*.

If we find ourselves slipping into depression, it's a good idea take stock of just what kind of demands we're putting on our bodies. Depression looks like a spiritual problem, but sometimes the best way to go after it is to get a good night's sleep and eat a good meal.

I'm convinced one of the reasons there's an epidemic of depression today is because of the frenetic pace we keep today.

The stresses of our age are greater than they've ever been.

And many of us are *over adrenalized!*

Consider how much of contemporary culture is aimed at pumping up the adrenaline.

Video games.

Movies; action, suspense.

Cliff-hanger TV shows.

Sports: *extreme* sports.

The biggest portion of the supplements market is pills that boost energy.

Energy drinks are taking over the beverage industry.

The *Energizer Bunny* is the mascot of the age.

There's a good reason why God called His people to a weekly day of rest & recreation.

We need it to keep from *burning out*.

As followers of Christ, we're not bound to the *law* of the Sabbath day - but as *human beings* were under the *principle* of the sabbath rest.

In other words, we don't *have* to keep the Sabbath as part of our *religion*, but we'd be *wise* to keep it as part of our *lifestyle*.

8

God did not send Elijah on this trip. He's making his own way here.

In v. 9 when he gets to Horeb, God asks him,, "What are you doing here?"

The point is this – one of the problems of depression is that you tend to make really bad decisions, that only compound your troubles and make the depression greater.

When depressed, it's best not to make any big decisions.

Don't trust your powers of analysis when you're feeling blue. God fed Elijah so that He could begin working on his emotional issue.

Elijah kind of wasted the help by using it to run away even farther.

200 miles, all the way to Horeb = Sinai; where Moses received the 10 Commandments.

Elijah spent 40 days wandering around the wilderness till he eventually found himself at Sinai.

So his depression has lasted now for nearly 7 weeks.

9-10

God didn't ask "*Why* are you here?" which is what Elijah answered.

The question was, "*What are you doing* here, Elijah?"

The answer was, "Nothing except feeling sorry for myself."

Elijah feels **justified** in his self-pity; look at his reply –

"I'm the only good guy left. Everybody else is a murderous traitor."

Depression has a cruel way of making us think we are all alone.

No one cares - not even God.

c. encounter with God • vs. 11-18

11-12

What's going on here? What's God teaching His prophet?

Well, Elijah was accustomed to seeing God work in **dramatic** ways.

The drought, being fed by ravens, the miraculous supply of flour & oil, raising the widow's son from the dead, calling down fire & rain from the skies have tuned Elijah to expect this kind of thing as God's normal way of revealing himself.

Elijah equated the **dramatic** with the manifestations of God.

So God brought him some drama **devoid** of His presence.

A fierce storm that tore the rocks apart hit Sinai.

An earthquake rocked its foundations.

A firestorm raked the side of the hill.

But God didn't utter a word to Elijah through any of these mediums.

It's in the silence following these cataclysms that Elijah hears a whisper.

A voice, small and calm, speaks to his **heart**.

While the Lord **does** occasionally work through dramatic events, His usual way is quiet & humble.

He can speak in fire from heaven but far more often it's a still, small voice in our hearts.

When Jezebel threatened Elijah, God had not sent a wind storm or earthquake to knock down the palace, no fire from heaven consumed her.

Instead of sitting still & seeking God on what to do – he bolted, thinking God had forsaken him.

He went running off in a flurry of fear & panic.

The remedy for Elijah's depression was to come to grips with the fact that God is still God & He is at work whether we see it or not.

God is neither compelled nor inclined to make us privy to His plans.

Elijah needed to learn this lesson.

He needed a fresh revelation of God to overcome his despair.

That is what God gave him

Did he learn?

13-14

We've already read this book; we've seen this movie!

Elijah's depression is still so deep, he sees nothing but it.

There's no reasoning him out of his despair.

So God goes about his recovery differently.

15-17

God told Elijah his ministry wasn't over – there was more for him to do.

Hazael was to be the new king up in Syria, Jehu would replace wicked Ahab, and Elisha would take over for Elijah.

Each of these 3 men would serve a unique role of executing justice.

Twice God asked, "**What** are you doing here, Elijah?" And twice Elijah had given the **why** he was there, not the what.

Actually, Elijah was doing nothing but whining.

So God in effect says, "Okay, you're not getting what I'm trying to teach you; but that doesn't change the fact there's important work to be done & you're the man to do it. So get out of this cave, and **get back to work.**"

Listen, we have to face it → Sometimes **depression** will **not** be overcome by addressing it head on.

Sometimes the only way to overcome depression is to push it aside

& get back to work doing what's needed.
Sometimes the *best counseling in the world* is of no help.
Look at who did the counseling here = God. But it didn't take.
The truths God shared with Elijah *eventually* helped him, but only later, after he went back to work.
God first took care of Elijah's *physical* exhaustion with rest & food.
Then He ministered to his *emotional* exhaustion by making His presence real.
But when he sought to dislodge the core lie, that fiery dart of doubt fired at him by the devil's agent Jezebel, Elijah remained stuck.
So God went after the depression via a different route –
Elijah's will.
He told him to get back to work.

Sometimes *re-devoting ourselves to our duty* is the best way to overcome depression.
When we've battled despair by resting, eating well, taking an honest look at our thoughts, & still not found nor relief = then we ought to put the despair aside & get back to work.
Once we exercise our will in making *the right decision* about our routine, & we do that day after day, the truth that will set us free from the lie that forms the tap-root of depression will become obvious and find its way into our hearts naturally.
Look - Elijah was *still* depressed, but God told him to exercise that part of him which *remained operative; his will.*
Francis Paget said it well.

“It may be *impossible* at times to *feel* what one *would*; it is *not impossible to will* what one *should*; and that, if the will be real and honest, is what matters most.”

I like what Dave Roper writes,
“We must get up and get going. There's always something God is asking us to do, something as simple as fixing a meal. He only asks us to do what He empowers us to do. We must shake off our lethargy and, like that other cripple who Jesus restored, get up from our beds and walk. It's necessary for us to take that first step, for God 'will carry us in His arms till we are able to walk and He will carry us in His arms when we are weary and cannot walk; but He will not carry us if we *will not* walk.' (George MacDonald)”

The issue for many is this → Do they really *want* to overcome depression or has it become an excuse for bad behavior or to avoid duty?

Somewhere along the line, we must *decide* that despair will end.

We can't passive & wait for it to *go away* by itself. We must fight!

Then God let's Elijah in on a little secret -

18

Elijah though he was all alone and that no one else cared about God but he.

God knows the number of all those who hadn't worshipped Baal but who grieved over Israel's apostasy as Elijah had. = 7,000! Sometimes, one of the greatest encouragements the person who's struggling with depression can hear is to know he/she is not alone in the circumstances that have conspired to drag them down.

Personally, I've had a couple battle with depression.

They began with a lie the enemy fired at me through another person.

It was silly, petty, inconsequential – but I bought it and invested in it big time.

I threw myself a pity-party and no one came.

I climbed in the hole and pulled it in after myself.

Oh – I felt so bad! And complained loudly to God about how unfair life was, He was.

Then I hear the story of a guy like Nick Vujicic, & feel utterly ashamed that I could let something so silly as the stinking infinitesimal lie take me so spiritually low.

Do you think you've had it bad, that you've had hard life?

That you deserve to be depressed?

That you're sitting here tonight in 2007 in the United States of America, in SC – seriously how bad could it be?

God's knowledge of these 7,000 faithful ought to be a great comfort to those of us who find ourselves in a spiritually hostile environment.

These people had not been able to be very bold or outspoken in their faith because anyone who did so was put to death by Jezebel.

But they'd not bent their knee to Baal. They'd maintained their faith in God & would continue to do so quietly until push came

to shove.

If brought to that point as so many others had been they *too* would rather suffer martyrdom than deny God.

It may be that *you* are in a hostile spiritual environment.

Be strong in your determination to abide in Christ.

Don't give in to the pressure to conform to the world.

Don't compromise, but realize as well, being faithful doesn't mean you have to state your confession as a *provocation*, just to prove you *really are* a believer.

God knows who are His and how grieved they are by the sin around them.

6. Selecting an apprentice • 19:19-21

19-21

This was an important part of Elijah's recovery from depression—a *friend*.

It takes him a while to realize that.

Elisha lived in the valley formed by the Jordan River.

He came from a wealthy family because they had 12 yoke of oxen in their plowing team.

Their fields were so vast, they had 12 plows tilling the soil side by side.

As the leaders, Elisha was at the end, taking the lead. His plowed rows provided the border & guide for the next guy, whose opposite edge provided the guide for the next guy & so on for all 12.

As Elijah passed by, he placed his outer garment over Elisha's shoulders.

The prophet's mantle was a symbol of his office as the spokesman for God because when he received a revelation from God or spoke for the Lord, he would take his mantle and place it on his head, as a symbol of being under the Lord's covering/authority.

When Elijah placed his mantle over Elisha's shoulders, it meant God was calling *him* to be a prophet.

Elijah didn't stop to chat.

It seems he intended to keep going.

Elisha was stunned & it took a few seconds for it all to register what was happening.

Then he went casing after Elijah & asked for permission to say

goodbye to his family.

Elijah's reply was a terse - "Yeah, whatever—go ahead. What concern is it of mine?"

At this point, Elijah had no intention of *mentoring* Elisha.

God had told Elijah what to do and he was only doing what he'd been told.

But Elisha determined to be trained by Elijah.

So he hurried home, made a final meal to commemorate his change of calling & took off after Elijah.

This is a case of *burning your bridges behind you*.

Elisha makes a bold statement of his intent to follow the Lord in his new calling as a prophet.

Those oxen and that plow had been the tools of his trade, his means of livelihood.

But God's call on his life means turning his back on his past identity and stepping into something new.

What he did in making this meal was done *publicly*, among those he'd grown up with & lived that life with.

Following Jesus must begin by stepping out & away from our old identity, our old lifestyle.

And it will invariably mean *saying goodbye* to some stuff that used to define us; clothes, music, books, movies, magazines, paraphernalia, art; stuff in drawers, boxes in the attic, or garage, the trunk or glove-box of our vehicle.