

1 Kings 19:1-9

February 5, 2023



SCRIPTURE

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^[a] 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 wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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 bush 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 some 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.

COMMENTARY

19:1. Once King Ahab arrived in Jezreel, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done. He recounted Elijah's proposal, the failure of Baal to respond to the prayers of his prophets, God's incredible display of power, the people's response, and the slaughter of all the prophets of Baal. Jezebel could look outside and see Elijah's prophecy of rain also had come true.

19:2. Hearing Ahab's account, Jezebel viewed Elijah's action as a vicious attack on her god Baal, something she refused to tolerate. She sent a messenger to Elijah, vowing he would die as had the prophets of Baal. As Elijah ran to Jezreel (18:46), he must have been overjoyed at God's great victory over Baal. The people had recognized the Lord as Victor and had acclaimed Him as their God (18:39). Surely Ahab also had been convinced that Baal did not exist and should not be worshiped. Elijah probably expected to return to Jezreel as a victorious prophet. Jezebel's message crushed his joyful celebration.



19:3. Elijah responded to Jezebel's threat with fear and ran for his life. Elijah's flight might have indicated a lack of strength to continue the fight against Baalism and Jezebel or a lack of faith in God's ability to protect him from Jezebel. His victory had turned into defeat. Many characters in the Bible experienced fear, including Abraham (Gen. 26:7), Jacob (32:11), Joshua (Jos. 8:1), and Peter (Gal. 2:12). We also face fear and sometimes, as Elijah, we seek to escape from frightening situations. When we allow threats to intimidate our faith, we cannot see how God can help us; fear then can overwhelm us. Elijah traveled south through Israel and Judah and arrived at Beersheba (bee ehr SHEE buh), the southernmost boundary of Judah. There Elijah left his servant, probably the same young man who had reported to Elijah on the status of the gathering rain clouds (1 Kings 18:43-44). Elijah's dismissal of his servant indicated his intention to abandon his prophetic ministry. He would no longer need a servant.

19:4. Alone, Elijah traveled another day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, a small shrub, and sought shelter in its meager shade. Elijah prayed that he might die. He had had enough of standing alone for God. He had grown tired of facing one enemy of God after another. He believed his service for God had been in vain. He, as his ancestors, had failed to lead Israel to a permanent commitment to the Lord. In his depressed state, death seemed the best alternative. Sometimes we may think biblical figures did not experience the same problems we do. James's statement that Elijah was like us emphasizes Elijah's humanity (Jas. 5:17). It shows, however, that God can use us ordinary people in wonderful ways as he used Elijah. Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah were not superhuman. They wrestled with temptation, experienced failure, felt fear, and struggled with depression, even as all of us do at times.

19:5. The past three years in Elijah's life had been trying and exhausting. As a known opponent of Baal, he topped Ahab and Jezebel's list of troublemakers (1 Kings 18:17). Although God had miraculously provided nourishment for him (17:6,15-16), he had watched his people suffer through the drought and still not repent and trust in the Lord. God's impressive victory on Mount Carmel had filled Elijah with joy and confidence, but that evaporated with Jezebel's threat. Within a short time he had journeyed approximately 100 miles, passing beyond the boundary of Judah and into the wilderness.

Physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion finally caught up with Elijah. He lay down under the shrub's shade and fell asleep. Believers are not immune to exhaustion and depression. Sometimes we exhaust ourselves through Christian service, spending all our time ministering to others without spending enough time with God and at rest. At other times the demands and stresses of life can take their toll. With no physical energy to face or complete tasks, we can despair of ever getting them done. With no mental energy, we cannot think clearly and can become discouraged when we cannot make sound decisions. With no spiritual energy, we lose sight of our divine source of strength.



In Elijah's time of need, God provided for him. God sent an angel who touched Elijah and told him to get up and eat. As God miraculously had cared for Elijah earlier (17:6,15-16), so He did again.

19:6-8. Elijah roused from his sleep and saw a freshly baked cake of bread and a jar of water. God provided the basic necessities for His servant. Elijah did not awaken to find a multicourse meal, a freshly drawn bath, and a warm bed. Elijah awoke to find hope. In the last few days, Jezebel's threat and the apparent ineffectiveness of his ministry had overwhelmed and depressed him. Now he realized God had not given up on him. The food and water brought hope but did not cure his exhaustion or depression. After eating and drinking, he lay down again.

19:9. God, who had spoken to Moses and Israel at Horeb centuries before, spoke to Elijah. He asked Elijah what he was doing at Horeb. While we might think God spoke to Elijah in a stern, accusing manner, He probably did not. God knew what Elijah had been through. Out of His great compassion, God encouraged Elijah to tell Him exactly what he was thinking. Of course, God knew.

MAIN POINT

In our spiritual, physical, and mental exhaustion, God can restore strength and hope.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Give a highpoint and a low point from this week.

Now think about highs and lows in terms of your spiritual life over the years. When in your life have you experienced a spiritual high? What happened?

Now think about a spiritual low you've had. What were the reasons for your despair? What emotions did you feel? How did your circumstances turn out?

The power of God had come upon the prophet Elijah in amazing ways. In a contest with the false prophets of Baal, Elijah demonstrated God's superiority in no uncertain terms. The false prophets lost the contest, and then they lost their lives. God also sent rain to end a long drought in response to Elijah's prayers. Then Elijah was empowered by God's Spirit to outrun the king's chariots. Elijah experienced a spiritual high greater than he could have imagined, but it was followed suddenly by deep low. In chapter 19, he felt tired, depressed, and alone.



UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:1-3.

How would you describe Jezebel based on these verses? What kind of person was she?

What did Jezebel say she would do to Elijah? How did Elijah respond to her threat?

Look at 2 Kings 9:30-37 to discover how Jezebel died. How did she continue to defy God and reject Him?

Jezebel—and people like her who reject God—often remain defiant to the end. She was an evil person who lived as she wanted, no matter the consequences. Sin often breeds this kind of self-destructive arrogance and heedlessness.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:4-6.

God's power had been on display for evil people to see, yet they did not bend their knees to God or to His prophet. The temptation to feel alone, afraid, depressed, and that his efforts were in vain must have been overwhelming for Elijah. He may have even wondered if God's purposes had failed. In this low point, Elijah chose to run away.

When have you worked or played to the point of exhaustion? What do you remember about your physical and mental state at the time? How did you cope?

Put yourself in Elijah's place and complete this sentence: "I ran because _____ and I was feeling _____."

What are some healthy ways of coping when we find ourselves feeling the way Elijah did? How should we approach God? How can we get refreshed?

How might God use loneliness and depression to speak into our lives? What can we learn about God and ourselves when we are depressed?

Elijah's faith may have crumbled due to his physical, spiritual, and emotional exhaustion. When we push ourselves to the extreme, we often need time to rest and recharge in all three arenas. Jesus, though fully God, was also fully man and had to spend time resting and retreating. Jesus needed physical and spiritual refreshing to have the strength and mental posture to continue ministering to people while training His disciples. We are no different—we need times of rest so that we do not fall victim to the temptations that often come our way when we are exhausted.



What was significant about the angel's presence, message, and provision in verses 5-6?

Elijah had journeyed out of Judean territory and into deeper desert. The broom tree under which he rested provided shade, and its roots could be used for food if necessary. The Lord had compassion on Elijah and sent an angelic messenger to wake him from his deep sleep. Not only did Elijah's body need rest, but also it needed fuel. God miraculously provided water and bread for the prophet to eat; afterward, Elijah needed even more rest and recovery.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 KINGS 19:7-9.

What was significant about Elijah retreating to Mount Horeb? What might he have been hoping for?

Elijah ran into the desert—the same place where his ancestors received the covenant. Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai) was an extremely important place to the Hebrew people. It was at Mount Horeb that Moses received the Ten Commandments and God's people experienced His presence. Elijah went back to this important landmark and would have his personal faith renewed by God's presence too.

Do you have a life experience that is specifically tied to a place where God worked? How can it be helpful when we return to the place where we last met God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is there something today that has you “on the run” from God like Elijah? What would you like to say to God about this circumstance?

Where are some places you often turn to for refuge other than God? Why do these ultimately fail?

What do you need most in your life right now—physical, emotional, or spiritual rest and revitalization? How will you allow God to meet you where you are and be your Provider?



PRAYER

Thank God for being present even when circumstances may tempt you to believe otherwise. Acknowledge that He knows your situation and is working to make everything for your good and His glory. Pray that you would be alert for times when you are physically, mentally, and emotionally spent.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of the life of Elijah.

February 12, 2023 --- 1 Kings 19:9-18

