

## 1st Kings Chapter 19 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is, "How God encourages us when things are going wrong". At this point in the story, Elijah is dealing with fear and worries. He went from a spiritual high of seeing God work in an amazing way to a spiritual low of fearing his own death and running away in his fear. Then the chapter focuses on how God restores Elijah's faith for the next part of his life.
  - a) Before I get into the specifics of explaining this story, consider times when one has done or seen something amazing and then fairly quickly go to a very low in a short time after that. In other words, our life goes from a "10" moment to a "1" time in a short time span. Why does that happen? The best answer I can give is God wants us to keep on trusting Him through the high and low moments of our lives. The danger of the high moments is our ego's build up and we start thinking that we are something special. That is when God usually has to say to us, "Let Me remind you who's really in charge here". I've seen time and time again of people going from moments of great victories to moments of great lows as God is saying in effect, "Are you going to trust Me or not?" That is the story that Elijah goes through in this chapter.
2. With all of that said, let me give some of the details of this chapter as it ties to the last one.
  - a) In the last one, Elijah was on an emotional high as he witnessed God do a mighty miracle in front of a very large crowd. God proved to the crowd that He was God, by physically accepting a sacrifice and then causing it to rain after a three plus year drought. I'm sure that Elijah at this point was thinking, "I'm pretty special. I organized this event and God responded to my request. I then prayed for the drought to end, and it did. Therefore, all the Israelites and the king should do what I say here, because I'm God's prophet."
  - b) Based on that high, Elijah at the end of the last chapter traveled to where the king and queen were living. Maybe not the palace itself, but close enough to where both of them knew where Elijah was. He probably thought, "They saw the show, they'll now convert to Judaism and I've done my job." Like I said, after the great high moments is usually when God will bring us down to low moments to remind us exactly who is in charge.
  - c) Here in Chapter 19, the queen of Israel is angry that Elijah had all the prophets of her false god killed. She puts another death sentence on Elijah's head. He runs for his life. Most of the chapter then focuses on God dealing with Elijah in his "woe is me" state of mind. This chapter is teaching us how to react in our own low moments and how to keep on trusting God when it seems like everything is now going wrong.
  - d) To say it another this way, God reminds Elijah through a series of events that He's still in charge, He still wants to lead Elijah to do other things, and that Elijah has had more of an impact than he thinks. This is God saying to Elijah, "You have obeyed Me. You did make an impact and I still want to use you to continue to make a difference if you are willing to trust Me during the low moments as well as during the high moments of your life."
  - e) That's God's message to you and me as well. When things are going well, God is there. When things are falling apart, God is still there, and He still wants us to trust Him in what we will look back as difficult moments of our lives. Recently I had a talk to a close friend who may have to move out of state for the first time in his life as he is about to lose his job that he's had for decades. He is one of the strongest Christians I know and his situation at work is his own test of faith at the moment. That's the type of message being preached in this chapter, that God is still there, even when things seem to be falling apart.
3. Therefore, whether or not you are in a situation like this at the moment, it's a good lesson to learn about how to handle life when things go from a great high to a great low. This lesson teaches us about how God guides us when life seems like it's falling apart and how to keep trusting Him in such moments. With that not to happy thought stated, it's time to start the verse by verse study of this chapter.

4. Verse 1: Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> 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."
- a) To explain Verse 1, we need to review a little as to where we left on in the story. In the last chapter, Elijah set up a contest to prove "God was God" and the false god Baal was not. The short version is hundreds of prophets of Baal failed to be able to have Baal take their offering by a sign of their offering catch on fire. At the same time, Elijah did a short prayer to God and then the offering that Elijah set up just disappeared in a big display of God's power along with the wood, stones and water that was poured on that offering.
  - b) This was one of those moments in the bible where God physically displayed himself to His people to show that He is God. The good news is that it impressed the crowd. The bad news is that we'll read that hearts did not turn to God after that despite the miracle.
  - c) Remember that the goal here is to have people turn to God with their lives. Elijah then ordered and killed all of Baal's prophets after that scene. This is all from the last chapter.
  - d) A question to ask here is, was it right for Elijah to kill that group? After all, it is our job to be a witness for God, not to kill unbelievers. Jesus wants us to persuade people based on the truth of His existence. So if all of that is true, why did Elijah kill all of these men? For starters one of the worse sins in the bible is to lead others away from God. Still, does that justify murder? No.
    - i) To understand, one has to learn a little about the worship of Baal. To show one's loyalty to this deity, they would sacrifice animals to it and sometimes even one's own children. It encouraged illicit sexual behavior to entice this god. I believe by Elijah killing them, the message is, "Just as you have caused the innocent death of others by your illicit sexual activity, here is your ultimate fate, life without God."
  - e) If you are wondering why I am stating all of this, it is necessary background in order to understand Verse 1 of this chapter. I'm willing to bet that the queen of Israel, Jezebel saw the big contest between God and Baal and it hurt her to see Baal lose. She left after that. This verse shows how she reacted to the news of Elijah killing those prophets.
  - f) Speaking of Verse 1 and 2, let's now talk about it. If you recall from the last chapter, it is now raining for the first time in over three years. King Ahab left Mount Carmel and went home to talk to his wife. He told her that Elijah had all of the prophets of Baal killed. You may also recall from the last chapter that these men ate with the queen daily. Her reaction was not "Good for Elijah, glad he won", but I want him dead for killing my friends!
  - g) Apparently she knew where Elijah was at this moment, or at the least the king did, so she was able to deliver a message to Elijah that she was going to have him dead just as he did kill all of those men. Her threat was she'd have this done within 24 hours. What I suspect is that if she really wanted Elijah dead, she would have the guards go kill Elijah. By using this threat, her goal was to drive Elijah far away and it worked. That way she could lead people back to worshipping Baal without the godly influence of Elijah on the scene.
  - h) In the next verse, we are going to read of Elijah fleeing for his life, which is logical if the queen of a country just put a death sentence on your head. Before we go there, let's talk about why the king and queen did not convert from Baal worship here. I speculate that they both saw the big event. King Ahab came from a Jewish background. I'm guessing that he thought, "OK, God is really God so now I should go ask my wife what we should do now." Her reaction to the event was in effect, "I don't care who won, I still believe in Baal and I cared about the lives of those men that Elijah killed. Therefore, he has to die or at least be kicked out of the country for what he did."
    - i) The question is now, if this miracle is not enough to convert the queen, what is? The answer may be none. Some people's hearts can grow so cold that not even a great miracle like this will get people to change their lifestyle.

- i) I admit, I feel for the king here. I know what it's like to be torn between what God wants and then wanting to please one's spouse. As leaders of families, there has to come times where one has to lead and say in effect, "This is not God's will for us to do this". The king focused more on pleasing his wife than he was on pleasing God and that became his own downfall. We will read later in this chapter that God predicts the fall of his kingdom due to his lack of a willingness to turn to Him. As I've been preaching a lot as of late, the way God punishes us for turning from Him, is He starts by taking away our opportunities to be a witness for Him and if we continue to turn from Him it goes downhill from there.
    - i) Ahab was elevated to a position of power by God, and because Ahab refused to turn to God especially after seeing great evidence of His existence, this will soon cost the king not only his kingdom but also his life.
    - ii) To paraphrase a proverb by Jesus, "To much is given, much is required." (Based on the Gospel of Luke 12:48.)
5. Verse 3: Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.
- a) The older I get, the more I'm convinced that one of the worst sins is "worry". That's when we turn from God because we let our fears take over our lives. I'm not saying we won't have problems in our lives when we become Christians. I am saying that worrying about things that are beyond our control harm us in ways we can't even imagine.
  - b) With that said, when Verse 3 says that Elijah was afraid and ran for his life, you know that this is not a good thing. It was natural to be scared of the queen's order. Remember Elijah should be used to a death sentence on him by now. The king effectively had one since the drought began. To say it another way, it is ok to pray, "God, I'm really scared here and I don't know what to do next." It is another to just run away in fear and ignore God. There may be times when God calls us to run and the bible lists such times of many heroes.
  - c) The good news is those who God calls, He never abandons. To say it another way, God can't not love what He loves no matter how hard we may turn from Him. Just as God is working to draw the Israelites back to Him, so He will work to get Elijah to trust in Him again despite the fact He runs away in these verses. Keep that concept in mind when we decide that we don't want God ruling over our lives at the moment.
    - i) Yes because God loves, we can't lose that love. At the same time there is always a price to be paid when we turn from Him. That is the lesson Elijah has to learn by his running away and the lesson we have to remind ourselves as Christians.
  - d) Meanwhile, back to the verses. We need to give a little geography lesson here. Both the king and Elijah are currently in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elijah runs as far south as he could go, not only to the Southern Kingdom, but the southern-most point there.
    - i) Apparently Elijah had a servant. I don't think Elijah had the money to hire him, so I suspect it was someone else who believed in God who was willing to follow him. All the text says here in effect is that when Elijah got to the most southern town in the Southern Kingdom, Elijah left the servant there, and then Elijah went into the desert area by himself. It's about an 80 mile journey that Elijah traveled.
    - ii) From there, Elijah rested under a broom tree. OK, we just had a short geography lesson on Israel, and now it's time for a quick discussion of trees, specifically, what is a broom tree? This is a bush that grows in the desert usually to about ten feet in height. Remember Elijah is alone in the desert. There are no shelters out there, so the only place to rest with any sort of shade is under this type of tree.
    - iii) Next we get a quick speech-prayer by Elijah. What he prays in effect is, "Despite how you used me for those miracles, I'm no better than any other man. I'm scared for my life here and I've had enough of being a prophet for You."

- e) Personally, I think this is the moment God was waiting for. God never told him to run to the desert (wilderness). God was waiting for Elijah to say, "I need your help here." We'll now read of God taking steps to increase Elijah's faith again in Him. I believe what God is going to say to Elijah is in effect, "I called you to be a prophet and I know what I'm doing. I know you are afraid here. I know this is tough. However, remember Elijah what is the greatest purpose one can have in life? To be used by Me (God) for My glory. That type of message is what God wants to say to us in our own moments of fear.
    - i) So when we have our own really bad moments in life why doesn't God speak out loud to us like He did to Elijah here? The answer is God recorded this moment for us to learn from. Just as God was with Elijah when he ran away from what God called him to do, so God still wants to guide us even when we've had enough and can't take it anymore. Our solution always starts with asking God something like what Elijah prayed for God to take his life here.
  - f) Before we move on, be grateful for the prayers God does not answer. Notice that Elijah is feeling so low, he asks God to take his life here and now. Because God ignored that plea, we will read of great ways that Elijah will be used by God in the future. In fact, because God in a sense said "no" to Elijah here, that is why it is predicted Elijah will return before the appearance of the Messiah (what we Christians call Jesus' Second Coming), not also to forget Elijah's appearing with Jesus as stated in the New Testament (See Mark 9:4 et. al.)
    - i) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, be grateful that God ignores our requests to end it all now. Even at our lowest moments, God wants to guide us for His use as we'll read how God helps Elijah back to where God wants him through the rest of this chapter.
  - g) To read the next verse, we need a quick reminder of Elijah's physical state. He has been running as hard as he could as far away as he could get from the king and queen of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Now here is Elijah out in the wilderness with the only place of shade being a desert broom tree. After Elijah tells God to please take his life now, we read that he falls asleep under this tree.
6. Verse 5 (cont.): All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> 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.
- a) Personally, even if I was exhausted, if food and water somehow appeared instantly, I'd be busy wondering where it came from or what it meant. However I believe Elijah is used to the idea of angels physically and daily supporting his life based on the events as stated in earlier chapters. Therefore Elijah probably thought, "OK, good more food from God, I'll just eat it and drink the water and not ask questions". Then since he was physically worn out from all of that running he's been doing, he fell back asleep.
  - b) Personally, if I was God and I just did this miracle for someone, I would still want to get their focus back on me, so next we read of another gift from God when Elijah woke up.
7. Verse 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." <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup>There he went into a cave and spent the night.
- a) The first thing I want you to notice about these verses is that God never said for Elijah to go to "Horeb". I'll explain where that is in a moment. All God said in effect, was "get up and eat some breakfast as I have plans for you". It is possible that God told Elijah to go to this specific location, but I don't believe Horeb was His will here.
  - b) OK so what and where is "Horeb"? We know it better as Mount Sinai, where Moses did receive the 10 Commandments back in Exodus. It is not in Israel, but in the wilderness area between Israel and Egypt. In case you care, it is much less than a 40 day journey to go from where Elijah was to Horeb. So why is 40 days mentioned? Glad you asked.

- c) To answer, notice the term "wilderness" is used earlier in this text to describe where it was that Elijah was living at this moment. Then it mentions a 40 day journey. We don't know if Elijah made it that whole way without food and water for 40 days miraculously or just if God provided for him other means on the way. The point is Elijah survived 40 days in this wilderness until he reached Mt. Sinai.
- i) In the bible, the time frame of "40" is associated with a time of testing. Just as the Israelites were 40 years in the wilderness for their punishment for a failure to trust God before they entered the Promised Land, and just as Jesus was in a wilderness for 40 days tempted by Satan, so we read of Elijah traveling for 40 days here.
  - ii) And the point is? Elijah was learning to trust God again. To put it another way, when we have our own "1" low moments in life and we have to rebuild our trust in God to guide us again, God will often guide us through our own test to say in effect, "Do you trust Me or not?" Remember my friend who is losing his long held job and may have to move out of state? He's going through his own "1" moment now. In that same room was another friend who survived a long time in a similar situation, and was supporting a wife and children. God got Him through a tough time after his own long struggle and this second person being there was a big help to my friend as he is dealing with his own issues at the moment.
  - iii) My point here is when we cry to God for help, God in His own way promises to lead us through our lives for His glory if we are willing to give our lives to Him.
  - iv) In the meantime, it is time to get back to Elijah at "Horeb" (Mount Sinai.)
8. Verse 9 (cont.): And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- a) Remember I said I'm not sure whether or not God actually wanted Elijah to travel to this particular location? That in effect is the question God is asking Elijah here. It may have been a case where God is asking Elijah about his mental state or maybe about his actual physical location or both. To state the obvious, if God is God, He knows all things. God poses this question not to learn the answer, but to get Elijah to think about what it is that he is doing at this moment in time.
  - b) Remember that Elijah earlier asked God if he could die now. God answered that prayer by providing food and water for this long journey. Elijah realized that God is not through with him by His response. Therefore for an angel to ask Elijah what he was doing, was in effect not a big deal anymore, so Elijah was ready to blurt out an answer in Verse 10:
9. Verse 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."
- a) I admit I'm fascinated by the fact that Elijah went from describing God in the third person in the first sentence to describing God in the first person in the second sentence. Notice the text goes from describing God as "the LORD God Almighty" to using the word "your" several times in the next sentence. It is as if Elijah realized he was talking to God directly and not an angel. It is my opinion and that of a lot of Christian bible scholars that Elijah is speaking to a "pre-incarnate" appearance of Jesus at this point, although it is impossible to prove one way or the other.
  - b) With that said, let me expand upon Elijah's fears at this point: Hey God, remember that big moment a few months back when You came down and accepted my offering? Well, it didn't do any good. As best I can tell, the Israelites didn't convert back to following You. In fact, in Northern Israel (a separate country at this point in case you forgot), those that live there tore down altars to You, put Your prophets to death, and now I'm the only one left from the Northern Kingdom that still worships You and they are trying to kill me too.
    - i) Whether or not all of this is actually true or not, is not the point here. The point is, Elijah is back to facing his fears again of dying. Considering how he was a man of great boldness in earlier chapters for God, it's interesting to see his fears take over.

- ii) One of the interesting things to consider in the bible is how often we fail at what we consider our "strong suit". It is as if we say to God, "I need help with this and that area of my life, but this part over here, I've got covered". Just as Peter was too afraid to stand up for Jesus and denied Him three times, despite Peter being a man of boldness, so Elijah's boldness for God is failing at this point in the story.
  - iii) The good news is God didn't abandon Peter when he had his low moment, so God does not abandon Elijah at his low moment nor you or me. The point here is Elijah is hiding out in a cave a long ways from North Israel out of fears of his own life.
  - iv) That is why God is asking Elijah what he is doing here at Mount Sinai when God called him to go be a witness for Him in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So with Elijah focusing on his fears of death, God is about to give Elijah a demonstration of who is control of life and death. With that said, we're ready for Verse 11.
10. Verse 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.<sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.<sup>13</sup> 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?"
- a) Before I comment on the specific demonstrations by God in this verse, notice that all of this ends with God asking the same question he asked Elijah a few verses back, that is, "What are you doing here, Elijah". My very loose translation: Am I God or not? I called you to be a witness for me to North Israel and here you are about 100 miles away down at Mount Sinai. Yes this is a famous place to visit historically, but it is not where I want you to be at this moment in time. Now that I've proved to You that I'm God and I'm in charge of Your life, get moving for Me as you Elijah have dedicated Your life to serving Me, so get moving in the specific direction I'm about to send you." As to where that is, that God is going to send Elijah, we'll get to that in the next set of verses. In the meantime it is time to discuss the specific events as described in these verses.
  - b) To start, notice the phrase "not in". It is used three times here. The text says God caused a powerful wind, but God was not in the wind. Then the text says God caused the ground to shake (earthquake) but God was not in that earthquake. Finally there was fire. Again it says God was not in the fire. To state the obvious, God caused all three of these things to occur, so God was "in" those things. Therefore, the text must mean something else by the phrase "not in".
    - i) First let me explain what it does not mean: There are Christians who think that the only way God can speak to us is by a small whisper. They think we have to strain hard in order to hear God's voice as if God can't get our attention whenever and however He wanted to. I hold the view that if God is God, we don't have to strain to hear His voice. If it is His desire to tell us something He makes known to us His will whenever and however He wants to. No straining needed on our part.
    - ii) So if this text is not about straining to hear God speak to us, what does it mean? It is here to remind us that God is in charge. It doesn't mean that every big event as a fire or earthquake means that God has a specific message for us alone. However, if we have dedicated our lives to serving Him, we have to do just that: Serve Him. So how do we do that? The basics of trusting Him, using prayer and the bible as a guide for our lives and living to make a difference for His kingdom. As to special messages from God for us, that is His business, not ours. Like I say every now and then, God hasn't lost my phone number, so if He wants to communicate a special message to me or You, He will and no strain is needed to hear that message.
    - iii) Again, after all of that, God's only message was, "What are you doing here?"

- iv) Since Elijah described his fear earlier in the text, God expands upon His question in the next verse by saying, "Let me tell you Elijah what it I want you to be doing next instead of you just sitting here in a cave in the middle of nowhere."
  - c) Before I move on, let me discuss the fact that Elijah wrapped his cloak (outer garment) around his face before he went out of the cave. I don't think it was to protect his face from the fire that just occurred. I think it was to say to God in effect, "OK, I'm tired of seeing all of these signs without any message of what to do next. Therefore I'll stop looking and just listen to what you have to say. The point is not to just blindly trust God and ignore where we're going at the moment. The point is not to trust in physical signs for God's direction, but trust in what it is He wants to teach us, first and foremost through His word.
    - i) Let me give a quick discussion here about signs from God directly. First of all, if God is God, He can communicate to us whenever and however He wants too. If He wants to give us a message through say a fire or earthquake or even through a quiet voice, it is His decision as to how He communicates that message to us. As I said earlier, I don't believe we have to strain or try hard to let God communicate to us. If God, is God He can give us a message whenever and however He wants to.
    - ii) Personally I believe God is more interested in our obedience and our trust in Him then in giving us verbal messages. Again if He has something to say to us, then He will and we don't have to learn how to listen. Have there been times in my life where I believe God has spoken to me? Yes. Can I prove it? No. Is that message distinct from my own thoughts, yes but I can't prove it. I just know based on the results of obedience that God has spoken to me. Personally, I'm more concerned with trying to be obedient to His Word, which is difficult enough as it is, then to worry about whether or not God is trying to speak to me audibly.
    - iii) In summary, don't worry about whether or not God is trying to speak to us and we're not straining to hear Him. If God is God, He can speak to us whenever and however He wants to and we don't have to strain to hear Him or train ourselves in how to listen. In other words, focus on being obedient to what His word teaches us and trust that He is guiding us. If He has something to say to us, He will make it obvious His way and on His timing.
  - d) With that speech out of my system, back to Elijah. We left him on Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb (same place) with God asking him the question, "What are you doing here?" The next verse is Elijah's response to God.
11. Verse 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."
- a) Once again, we have Elijah speaking to God in both the third person (referring to God as the "LORD God Almighty") and in the first person using the word "your" a few times.
    - i) That's why I hold the view that it is Jesus in His pre-incarnate state. It is Elijah saying in effect I care about pleasing God Your Father and You as well. Of course I may be wrong about that, but it would explain the "1st and 3rd Person reference".
  - b) In the meantime Elijah is still in his "woe is me" frame of mind. In other words, mentally he is a "1" after the high of the "10" experience of God accepting his offering.
    - i) To paraphrase Elijah, "It didn't work God. After that great demonstration, no one in the Northern Kingdom of Israel has turned to you. In fact the people there have broken down the altars dedicated to You, they have put to death anyone who does believe in You and now I'm the only one left of that kingdom who trusts in You."
    - ii) Now if that isn't a "woe is me" moment, I don't know what it. Before we get to God's response in the next verse, consider what Elijah is doing right here: He is taking his situation to God in prayer. He's crying out to God about the pain he's in at this "1" moment of his life and saying in effect, "Help me God, I need you here."

- iii) Even without giving God's formal response, know that if we have dedicated our lives to serving God He does care about us and wants us to go forward no matter the situation truly is.
  - c) With that said, let's focus on Elijah's "woe is me" moment here. Notice Elijah believes he is the only one from the kingdom of North Israel who still believes in Him. If you recall from the last lesson, the head of the king's house believed in God and hid 100 prophets of God in a cave. My point is that if Elijah wasn't so busy having a pity party for himself, he should have recalled that he wasn't the only true worshipper of God left. That's how we feel when we hit our "I" moments: Nobody can understand my pain. Nobody but me has ever gone through what I'm feeling right now. Of course none of that is true, but that is what Elijah is thinking at this moment.
    - i) What we have to realize at such moments is first of all, we are not alone. There are others who have successfully survived through whatever it is we're going through at the moment. More importantly, God does care about our problems and wants to guide us through them for His glory. Just as God is working to guide Elijah to end his own pity party, so God can and does guide us to get us back to where He wants us to be in our lives both mentally and physically.
    - ii) With that in mind, it's time for God's response to Elijah's pity party:
12. Verse 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. <sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."
- a) God's response to Elijah is in effect, "No I'm not done with you. I have some people I want you to go anoint. As to your fear that there is no one else but you that trusts in Me in the Northern Kingdom, know that there are 7,000 people in that country that still have not trusted in Baal.
  - b) At this point, let me give a few details about these verses and what happened historically. The short version is we don't read in 1st Kings of Elijah ever actually anointing either Jehu to be the next king of Israel or a man named Hazel to be the next king of Aram, which is a kingdom to the north of that Northern Kingdom. However, we will read of Elijah naming his successor, who is named Elisha. I have a lot to say about Elisha coming up.
    - i) First, let me explain what is going on here: God is telling Elijah that He is going to bring Baal worship to an end in North Israel through these three people. That is by these two new kings to come and through this other prophet named Elisha. That's why you, Elijah don't have to worry about My people turning away from Me. I'm already working on a plan to bring this bad practice to an end.
    - ii) To say it another way, I God am going to work out things the way I want them to work out. You, Elijah, have a choice to make. You can just sit here and continue in your pity party, or you can get up and continue to make a difference for Me. It is your choice as to how to use your time, but I'm trying to encourage you Elijah as well as all of us to use our time to make that difference for God with our lives.
    - iii) In fact, Elijah, if you are really interested in helping me, here are some people I'd like you to meet and anoint to be future leaders to eliminate those bad leaders who turn my people from me.
    - iv) One more quick detail and then I'll talk about how God deals with you and me in our own pity parties. Notice the verse says people who "kiss" Baal. This was part of the ritual of trusting in the false god Baal to kiss a statue of him. It was a sign of respect to that deity. All God was saying about that is He is aware of 7,000 people who have refused to perform that ritual.

- v) I have to admit I can't resist sharing a cute story based on that 7,000 figure. There was a time in my life where I was involved in a Christian denomination that was accused of dying. Let's just say the national office of that group was doing things that most devout Christians would not approve of. There was and is a movement for many churches in that organization to break away from the national group. I got into a conversation with someone who said to me, "You have to get out of that organization as there are no Christians left there." I responded with that quote of 7,000 people who have not bowed the knee to Baal. My point is I'm positive there are still lots of very good Christians in that denomination and not all have turned from God despite some of the actions of the national office.
  - c) Before we move on, let me come back and talk about our own "pity parties" for a moment. Let's be honest, when we are low, God does not give us a big message to go anoint this or that person and continue with what He has done. This is why I emphasize the fact that trusting in God is not about looking for signs, but about learning from His word as how He wants us to live out our lives. During those low moments, if possible, just read one's bible for a bit to remind ourselves who is in charge of our lives. I'm not saying our issues will magically go away. I'm saying it changes our perspective about how to deal with our issues of the moment. I have also learned that if one is in a pity party moment, if we go to do something, anything for someone else it gets our focus off of us as we focus on making a difference for others around us.
    - i) In summary, the way to deal with a woe is me moment, is to get our focus back on God, trust that He is guiding us and if we don't know what to do next, go out and do something to make a difference for someone else. Even if we don't feel we can help anyone else at that moment, we owe it to those around us to act happy.
    - ii) To put it simply, our mood is not nearly as important as how we act. To borrow a quote from radio personality Dennis Prager who as a boy told his rabbi when he didn't feel like praying right now, his rabbi responded with, "who cares what you feel like doing right now? You owe it to people around you to act a certain way no matter how you feel at this moment!" To translate that to Elijah, God is saying, "I don't care what you feel like doing. I called you to be a witness for Me. Now get moving to where I want you to go and stop feeling sorry for yourself".
  - d) Therefore, with the marching orders to go find these three people, the next thing we read of is Elijah finding Elisha. What I suspect is of those three, Elijah had an idea where to go find Elisha, so he is first on the list. To put that in our terms, if we don't know what to do next, do what is logically and then let God lead us to our next step.
    - i) So you know, Elisha (yes I know it is confusing as the names are similar) becomes a major character in the next several chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. We're going to spend a lot of time discussing who he is and what God called him to do. The way I keep them straight is simply in English the letter "J" comes before the letter "S" so I remember Elijah came before Elisha in history. For now, we are just going to get introduced to Elisha here in the next verse. Speaking of which:
13. Verse 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.<sup>20</sup> Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you."
- a) To begin, I need to explain what Elisha is doing here. Visualize a farm with a group of tractors all moving together in a line to plow that farm. In an agricultural society like Israel was at that time, for someone to be plowing 12 yokes (groups) of oxen, is similar to a farmer organizing a group of tractors all plowing the land at the same time. To say it another way, Elisha came from a relatively wealthy background. Even with that said about Elisha, he was personally willing to do the dirty work of driving the 12th team.

- b) As I state a lot, remember that the nation of Israel is a hot dry climate. Now picture a lot of dust being kicked in the air by teams of oxen being driven to plow the ground. Here was Elisha, who the text implies was the owner of this land, driving the last team. That means he was getting the dust in his face as he was working the oxen. If you don't know, oxen are the largest animals that can be domesticated by people for service. That is why the ox is associated with service. Elisha isn't afraid of doing hard work himself here.
- i) Getting back to the scene, Elijah got out of his pity party and traveled to where he last knew of Elisha to live. I picture Elijah asking around the town associated with Elisha where he could find him. Someone probably said, "He's working out in the fields today, if you travel there, he'll be pulling one of the plows."
- c) The bottom line is Elijah spotted and recognized Elisha working and went up to him and threw his coat around him. Apparently Elisha knew who Elijah was and Elisha knew that Elijah was a prophet of God. Apparently Elisha also understood the symbolism of Elijah throwing his garment around Elisha that he was calling him to serve God with Elijah.
- d) Again, if you are confused by the very similar names, remember that "J" as in Elijah is in our alphabet before the "S" as in Elisha. As silly as this sounds, think of the English word "Jesus" it begins with a "J" and ends with an "S" and the "S" will replace the "J" in terms of who is next to be used by God to lead the Israelites back to God.
- e) To jump ahead of the story a little, we'll eventually read that it was Elisha not Elijah who is going to anoint the next king of Israel and that king of the place called Aram that was mentioned earlier in the text. So what we are reading here is the first passing the baton from one prophet to another. That is what the symbolic act of Elijah putting his cloak (an outer garment) on Elisha meant.
- f) Coming back to the text, give God a little credit here for picking out a good man to be the next spokesman for God. Elisha's response to the cloak throwing was in effect, "let me go say goodbye to my parents and then I'll come follow you". It is as if Elisha realized, there is no greater purpose in life than to be used by God, so it is time for me to throw away my oxen and live a life for God's glory.
- i) I could probably give a wonderful lecture here based on Jesus' words of "no man willing to look back is fit for the kingdom of God" (loosely based on Luke 9:62). However, I don't think Elijah wants to look back as much as he just wants to say goodbye to his parents to go start the life God called him to live.
- ii) Now let me quickly talk about us in the role of Elisha here. Does this mean that God wants us to quit whatever it is we are doing to go be a prophet for Him? My answer is both yes and no. It doesn't mean God wants us to say quit or job or go say goodbye to our parents as if we'll never see them again. It means that once we get the idea that God is in charge of our lives, He and not our parents or anyone else for that matter is now in charge of our lives. That means we do what it is that He wants us to do. We look to God for guidance. As for Elijah, it's almost as if he thought, "I'm so bored with plowing the ground, I wish I could do something for God that makes a true difference for Him. That is why I suspect he couldn't wait to go tell his parents goodbye and that he still loved them but now he is getting a chance to use his life for a greater purpose.
- g) With that said, we now get this strange response by Elijah in the last part of Verse 20:
14. Verse 20 (cont.): "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"
- a) To translate Elijah, "You have no idea what you are getting yourself into yet. You don't know how difficult it is to trust God and have Him guide you. Yes it's the greatest reason one can have to live, but it's not a bed of roses. It is hard work and you may have to risk your lives in ways you can't even imagine yet. So before you jump at the chance to say yes, stop and consider what it is that you are getting yourself into here. To quote Jesus again, "Stop and consider the cost" (My paraphrase of Luke 14:28).

15. Verse 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.
- a) Notice the text does not focus on the goodbye scene between Elisha and his parents who we assume were nearby. Instead the final verse in this story talks about how he took the yoke of oxen (probably two) that Elijah was using for plowing and he cooked the meat and shared it with everyone around them.
  - b) I have to admit if I was Elisha's parents I might have said, "Why are you killing what we need to plow the field? Grant it, these are good burgers, but we needed those oxen."
  - c) Instead, we get Elijah making his point that he is ending his old life of plowing the fields to go follow Elijah. I suppose it is one thing to tell your parents, "I'm out of here". It is another thing to make your point in a dramatic way. I have to admit, this sort of reminds me of Jesus telling Peter the fisherman, "Follow me and I'll make you a fisher of men." I get the impression after Jesus split the scene, Peter didn't do a lot of fishing after that.
  - d) At this point I need to introduce another classic Christian expression: It goes, "Every Paul needs a Timothy and every Timothy needs a Paul". In the book of Acts, Paul starts to use a young man named Timothy as someone who followed him. As important as it is to help raise up the next generation of Christians I also think it benefits the faith of older believers as well. As I said every Paul (think Elijah) needs a Timothy (think Elisha) just as much as every Timothy (young believer) needs an older believer for guidance.
    - i) The point as it relates to the story here is that one way God worked on rebuilding the faith and trust of Elijah, is to have him work to train up another prophet.
  - e) In summary, let me consider how God worked on Elijah to rebuild his faith. First we read of God helping Elijah with his physical needs. He provided food for him and let him rest. Then God asked Elijah to consider what it is he was doing in the middle of nowhere. The last step was God gave Elijah a new assignment to get others to help him in his desire to have others follow God. That's why God told Elijah to go anoint those two other kings to be, as well as anoint Elisha to be a future prophet.
    - i) OK you say, when my life has it's "1" moments, I don't get cute little miracles like that where food magically appears or God makes fire and earthquakes appear out of nowhere. Where is my guidance? My answer is that we have to trust that God is still working in our lives His way and on His timing. During our low moments we need to seek Him for help and even spend time with other believers who can and are willing to listen to us talk it out. Seeing other people survive through their own tough times can help us deal with our own issues. Therefore, be willing to be a "Paul to a Timothy" and be willing to be a "Timothy to a Paul" as God wants us to work as a team not only to trust Him more, but to collectively make a difference for Him in our lives.
    - ii) Therefore, during our "1" low moments, continue to trust and seek out God that He is there and willing to guide us. Then, don't go at it alone. Seek others who are willing to listen and guide you through such times. Further, one way to get out of the worst of depressions is to be of service to someone else. I'm sure that it encouraged Elijah to go do "something", and it started by anointing Elisha to be a prophet for God himself.
  - f) Let me say one more thing about Elisha, and then I'll finish this lesson. Notice that Elisha started his role as a prophet by being an attendant to Elijah. I have found that if you want to be used greatly by God, it always starts by accepting a low, starting job. I believe that Elisha came from a wealthy background. Here, Elisha had to humble himself and become a lowly servant of Elijah. I've lost track of the people that I've seen used greatly by God who started out by just being willing to serve others. To say it another way, we can't just walk into a church and say, "I have this wonderful gift of teaching, where is my pulpit?"

- i) I think you get the idea from there, so I won't beat the point to death. Therefore, as I promised, I'll wrap it up here in my closing prayer.
16. Father, help us to be a good servant of You and do what it is that You desire we do. Help us not to demand leadership or a great role, but be willing to be used by You in whatever it is that You desire that we do with our lives in service to You. Father, when those "10" moments come in our lives, help us to remember that those "1" moments usually come next. During those low times, help us to recall that You are there want to guide us through them. Help us to trust You in such times and lead us closer to You through them. Finally, help us to work as a team to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.