

Lesson 4 on Elijah & Elisha 1 Kings 19-20

1. 1 Kings 19:1-2

A. At the end of Chapter 18, Ahab leaves Mount Carmel for Jezreel with Elijah running before him.

1. Why did Ahab go to Jezreel?

a) Jezebel was in Jezreel, and, like a small child who has really made a mess of things, Ahab was running home to "Mommy."

b) Notice what he tells her – he tells her all about what Elijah had done with not one word about God!

2. Why did Elijah go to Jezreel?

a) Verse 46 tells us that Elijah went to Jezreel because the hand of the Lord was upon him. But, as usual, Elijah did not find what he expected when he got there.

b) Elijah no doubt thought that the war was over, but he will soon find out that the war has just started. If he thought he would march victoriously into Ahab's home territory, he would be sadly mistaken. Instead, he stays for only two verses before running for his life!

c) Elijah will soon find himself on another mountain, but not to confront Baal. Instead, this time Elijah will confront Jehovah.

3. The text has already hinted that Jezebel rather than Ahab is the real power in Israel, and we are now about to find that out for sure.

a) So far, Jezebel has remained in the background while Elijah has dealt with Ahab. Yet even in Chapter 18 we could see the focus start shifting her way.

(1) It was she who killed the Lord's prophets in 18:4 leaving Ahab unable to find even the one prophet he was looking for.

(2) It was she who Elijah identified as the focal point of opposition in 18:19, and it was her prophets who somehow escaped the calamity on Mount Carmel.

- b) So we are not surprised when Ahab runs home to Jezebel to tell her what has happened.
 - (1) Can you imagine this scene? Can you imagine Jezebel's questions? "What did you do to Elijah? You let him go?!!"
 - (2) As usual, it is Jezebel who takes the immediate and decisive action of which Ahab was incapable. She solemnly swears to kill Elijah, and Elijah knows from her track record that she means business!
 - (3) Elijah has finally met someone who is as committed to Baal as he is committed to Jehovah.
- c) But Jezebel is perhaps not without fear herself! She sends a messenger to Elijah rather than confront him in person.

2. 1 Kings 19:3-5

- A. Elijah sees how things are and runs for his life.
 - 1. Elsewhere, when Elijah has traveled, he has done so according to the "word of the Lord," but in this case that phrase is absent.
 - 2. Elijah travels to Beersheba, far to the South, and seemingly as far from Jezebel as he could go.
 - 3. "In three short verses the flow of the story has totally changed. Victory seems to be transformed into defeat, the brave prophet into a cowardly refugee, and the victory over death and Baal into an opportunity for death to reassert itself through Jezebel's oath to take Elijah's life."
- B. What happens when Elijah finally reaches Beersheba?
 - 1. Even this far south, Elijah still does not feel safe. He leaves his servant in the city and heads out alone into the wilderness.
 - 2. He sits down under a tree and ironically prays for death. (The reason he ran away in the first place was to save his life!)
- C. Talk about a dramatic change of circumstances!
 - 1. Just a few verses ago Elijah was literally on top of the world as he defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and now here he is

far away, very much alone, and praying for death. "Elijah was caught in the backwash of a great victory."

2. Elijah was not the first servant of God to experience a deep valley after a mountain top event, yet rarely has the mountain been so high and the valley so deep.
 - a) Paul, for example, "despaired even of life" at one point in his ministry. (2 Corinthians 1:8)
 - b) In Jonah 4, Jonah also sat down under a tree and prayed for death
3. From the heights of Mount Carmel, Elijah now found himself mired in discouragement, despondency, and depression. Elijah had come to the end of his rope.
4. I'm glad God included Chapter 19 along with Chapter 18. By seeing Elijah both on the mountain and in the valley, we know that God understands that we also have mountains and valleys. And by studying Elijah's valley experience, we can see how gently God deals with those who pass through deep valleys
5. "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

3. 1 Kings 19:5-8

- A. So far in this chapter, everything Elijah has done has been in response to Jezebel's messenger in verse 2. God has not been in the picture.
- B. What would God do? Rather than sending a great fish to swallow up Elijah, God sends an angel to twice miraculously provide food for him.
- C. Elijah thought his journey was over, but the angel tells him he is about to leave on a journey that will be too much for him if he doesn't eat and regain his strength.
- D. Elijah travels 40 days and forty nights until he reaches Mount Horeb.
 1. The food provided by God in the wilderness and the 40 days and 40 nights of wandering both recall Israel's own wilderness wanderings following the Exodus. In fact, Mount Horeb is none other than Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law of God. (See handout.)

2. But will Elijah, like Moses, meet God when he reaches this mountain? Or will Elijah, like Israel, continue in his rebellion when he reaches the mountain?

4. 1 Kings 19:9-12

- A. When Elijah reaches the mountain, he finds a cave and crawls inside to spend the night.
 1. Some commentators suggest that this cave may be the very "cleft of the rock" where God placed Moses as his glory passed by. (Exodus 33:21-23)
 2. Elijah finds a dark place to fit his dark mood, and as we will soon see, God's first effort to change Elijah's thinking involves trying to get him to come out of that cave – which Elijah refuses to do.
- B. God asks Elijah a question – “What are you doing here?”
- C. Elijah responds in verse 10: "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
 1. Elijah's memory is very selective. He is recalling the bad events in Chapter 18 without any mention at all of the good events.
 - a) True, God was rejected in 18:18, but the people repented in 18:39.
 - b) True, the altar was torn down in 18:30, but the altar was rebuilt in 18:30-32.
 - c) True, God's prophets were killed in 18:13, but Baal's prophets were killed in 18:40.
- D. We can learn four things about Elijah from his answer in verse 10.
 1. Elijah's answer tells us he was suffering from loneliness.
 - a) Elijah complains that he is the only faithful servant of God left, or perhaps the only prophet of God left. Either way, he was all alone.
 - b) One of the very first things God ever said about man was that it is not good for him to be alone. (Genesis 2:18)

- c) But Elijah was suffering from self-inflicted loneliness. He had intentionally left his servant behind in Beersheba and had gone out into the wilderness alone. He wanted to be alone. And yet a self-inflicted isolation is very dangerous.
 - (1) "I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing. I have made a captive of myself and put me into a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out."
–Nathaniel Hawthorne
 - d) Discouraged, depressed, and despondent people are usually lonely people. Or is it that lonely people are usually discouraged, depressed, and despondent people?
2. Elijah's answer in verse 10 also tells us he was suffering from self-pity.
- a) The resistance of a single woman (Jezebel) had been magnified in Elijah's mind to the point that the one woman trying to kill him had in verse 10 become the plural "they."
 - b) Self-pity will lie. Self-pity will exaggerate. Self-pity will cultivate a victim mentality in your mind. "Self-pity mauls its way inside our minds like a beast and claws us to shreds."
3. Elijah's answer in verse 10 tells us he was suffering from an inflated view of his own importance. (Recall our discussion about pride in Lesson 2.)
- a) His God-given success seems to have fostered a feeling of pride that made Elijah take his own importance much too seriously.
 - b) He thought the war was over with a single battle – and he was shattered when he realized that Jezebel was not scared or impressed at all by the events on Mount Carmel.
 - c) He seems to have thought that God could not get along without him – and perhaps he was trying to teach God a lesson! "If God thinks he can get along without me, let's just let him try it!"
4. Elijah's answer in verse 10 tells us he had become very bitter.
- a) As described in Hebrews 12:15, a root of bitterness had sprung up in the life of Elijah.

1. In 18:26 and 29, Baal had no voice. Here God speaks to Elijah with only a small voice. The Hebrew means a barely audible whisper.
2. Perhaps God wanted Elijah to know that He does not always operate in the realm of the spectacular. And perhaps God wanted to teach Elijah not to always expect a miraculous and wondrous deliverance from his problems.
3. Although we are not explicitly told that God is in this small voice, it is clearly implied by the sequence of events. It is also implied by verse 13, in which God comes to Elijah speaking with this same "voice" rather than with the "word of the Lord" as he did in verse 9.
4. God's will does not always involve fire from Heaven – and that is a lesson that even the Apostles needed to be taught!
5. (Luke 9:51-56) Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."
6. We, like James and John, might sometimes wish that God would work today by sending fire down from Heaven to destroy all that is false, but he does not. Instead, he speaks today through his written word with a small quiet voice to a noisy, turbulent world. And we are that small voice. And what if we are silent?

5. 1 Kings 19:13-18

- A. Privileged like Moses to meet God on the Mountain, Elijah seems intent on remaining like Jonah. After the demonstration in verses 11-12, God once again in verse 13 asks Elijah what he is doing here, and Elijah in verse 14 responds exactly as he did before. God's lesson seems to have passed him by. Elijah just stubbornly repeats his earlier answer.
- B. Told by God in verse 11 to go out and stand on the Mountain, Elijah has by verse 13 made it only as far as the mouth of the cave, where he stands

with his cloak wrapped around his head. It appears that Elijah is trying very hard not to see something that is right before his eyes.

1. God is trying to draw Elijah out of that cave of self-pity, discouragement, and depression – but Elijah is resisting.
- C.** God this time comes right to the point – he tells Elijah what he is to do:
1. He is to anoint Hazael to be King of Syria in place of Ben-Hadad, Israel's perennial adversary, who we will meet in the next chapter.
 2. He is to anoint Jehu to be King of Israel.
 3. He is to anoint Elisha to be a prophet.
- D.** A new order is to succeed the old, and it is this new order that will bring about a final victory over Baal. The final victory will come not through the actions of Elijah, but through the actions of others.
- E.** Also, God tells Elijah that he is not alone – there are at least 7000 other Israelites who have not bowed down to Baal.
1. God's word would not be silenced even if Elijah were killed by Jezebel. God had 7000 other faithful servants on his side.
 2. As we saw before, Elijah was suffering from loneliness – and God gave him four remedies to that terrible condition.
 - a) First, Elijah was told to focus on God.
 - b) Second, Elijah was told to get busy.
 - c) Third, Elijah was told that he was not alone in his faithfulness to God – there were 7000 others.
 - d) Fourth, God provided for Elijah a close, personal friend – Elisha.
 3. These are good lessons for us as well when we find ourselves shut away in a cave of loneliness and discouragement.
- F.** God's plan sometimes involves the spectacular (as we saw in Chapter 18), but it often involves the quiet ways of God's providence in which the still small voice of God may sometimes seem as quiet as the false gods who have no voice. And yet God is not quiet. His plans are at work

accomplishing his will, and Elijah must be content with being part of that plan rather than the entirety of that plan.

- G. Elijah had fled to the South, but God now tells him in verse 15 to go north to the Desert of Damascus.

6. 1 Kings 19:19-21

- A. Elijah heads north, but we get the idea that his response to God's commands is not as wholehearted as it might once have been.
 - 1. He meets Elisha, but there is no mention of any anointing.
 - 2. There is no indication that Elijah ever met or even tried to meet with Hazael or Jehu.
 - 3. In fact, the only one of these three that we are ever told is anointed is Jehu, and this is arranged not by Elijah but by Elisha in 2 Kings 9:1-13.
- B. Elijah's weariness and lack of enthusiasm stand in sharp contrast to Elisha's enthusiasm and wholeheartedness.
 - 1. After the prophetic mantle is cast over him, Elisha immediately cuts himself loose from his family and his livelihood and follows after Elijah. In fact, Elisha destroys his means of livelihood by killing his oxen and burning his plow. Even the apostles did not show this level of commitment, only "leaving" rather than destroying their nets. Elisha literally burned his past behind him.
 - 2. (Luke 9:62) "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
 - 3. Elijah, whose name means Jehovah is my God, has met Elisha, whose name means God Saves. And as Elijah prepared the way for Elisha, so did John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus, whose name also means "God Saves."
- C. For now, Elisha steps into the background of the story, but he will soon walk out onto center stage.

7. 1 Kings 20:1-12

- A. Having finished Chapter 19, we might now expect to read about Elijah's meeting with the future King Hazael or the future King Jehu, as he anoints them according to the command of God. But instead we meet a different

prophet, and we meet a different king. Neither Elijah nor Elisha are mentioned anywhere in Chapter 20.

- B.** Yet Chapter 20 perfectly underscores the message of Chapter 19.
 - 1. Elijah is not the only servant of God left, and he is not the only person God will use to carry out his plans.
 - 2. Also, we see here in Chapter 20 that the quiet ways of God must be allowed to proceed before the great events in 19:17 come to pass. Not everything in God's plan involves fire coming down from Heaven!
- C.** Chapter 20 begins with Ben-Hadad, the King of Syria, attacking and besieging King Ahab in his capital city of Samaria.
 - 1. This had happened once before in Chapter 15 when another Ben-Hadad (likely the father of this one) attacked Baasha, King of Israel, at the invitation of Asa, King of Judah.
 - 2. This is most likely the event referred to in verse 34 of Chapter 20, where "father" most likely means predecessor (since Omri rather than Bassha was the literal father of Ahab.)
- D.** Ben-Hadad wants to reduce Israel to vassal status or perhaps keep Israel in that status (in which case these events may have been caused by a rebellion of Ahab). His terms are at first accepted by Ahab in verse 4.
- E.** But then Ben-Hadad revises his terms to ask for even more, and Ahab rejects the new terms. This refusal elicits threats and taunts, and when we reach verse 12, battle is the only option left.
- F.** Ahab's reply to Ben-Hadad in verse 11 is classic --- "One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off!" Brave, brave Ahab!

8. 1 Kings 20:13-21

- A.** The mystery of God's quiet ways in guiding human affairs is well illustrated by what happens next.
- B.** Ahab at last receives good news from a prophet of God! He is told in verse 13 that the superior Syrian (or Aramean) forces will be given into his hand. Incredibly, Ahab is being given a second chance to demonstrate obedience to God rather than rebellion. Which choice will he make?
- C.** Ahab follows instructions and sends his army out for a preemptive strike.

- D. The plan benefits from Ben-Hadad's drunkenness in verse 16, which may have lead to his strange command in verse 18 to take everyone alive and his order to send chariots into the hills, where they are the least effective.
- E. The Syrians in the front line are killed, and the rest flee along with their drunken king.
- F. The number 7000 in verse 15 is interesting.
 - 1. The Hebrew in verse 15 is literally "all the people, all the Israelites, 7000." That number seems a little low.
 - 2. The number 7000 of course recalls what we just read in Chapter 19 about the faithful remnant. This group of 7000 may denote a select group of Israelites who had sworn special allegiance to the King. The Septuagint says that these were 7000 "men of substance."

9. 1 Kings 20:22-25

- A. Following the battle, each side begins to prepare for the next battle that they all knew was coming.
- B. The Syrians plan is to attack next time in the plains because they think Israel's "gods are gods of the hills." Perhaps they had heard about the events on Mount Carmel!
 - 1. The Syrians believed that God was geographically limited. Vacationing Christians have been known to make that same mistake!

10. 1 Kings 20:26-34

- A. The vast Syrian army marches up a second time against Israel, whose forces are by comparison described in verse 27 as two small flocks of goats.
- B. Yet the result is the same. Once again God delivers the superior Syrian forces into Israel's hands.
- C. The Israelites inflict extraordinary casualties, and the wall of Aphek falls on those who sought refuge in that city.
- D. In verses 29 and 30, we see that 100,000 Syrians were killed by the Israelites and 27,000 were killed by the falling wall. These numbers seem a little high. (For example, the United States lost 291,000 men in battle during all of World War II.) What is the solution?

1. One solution is that no solution may be required at all. In particular, the miraculous may be involved with these super high casualty figures. The Israelite army may have looked like two small flocks of goats, but they had God on their side – and God may very well have destroyed a huge army on their behalf.
 2. Another possibility may lie in translation difficulties with the Hebrew scriptures. In the modern Hebrew Bible, all numbers are written out in full, but for a long time the text was written without vowels. The absence of vowels made it possible to confuse two words that are crucial to this problem: eleph and alluph. Without vowel points, these words look identical. Eleph is the ordinary word for 'thousand', but it can also be used for family or clan or perhaps a military unit. Alluph is used for the chieftains, for a commander of a military thousand, and for a professional, fully-armed soldier.
 - a) This solution would mean that the little Israelite army killed 100 Syrian soldiers rather than 100,000 and that the falling wall killed 27 soldiers rather than 27,000. These numbers are much closer to what we would expect for a normal battle during this time period. Or if the word means "officer," then 127 officers were killed.
- E.** Finally in verse 31 Ben-Hadad's officials decide it is time to surrender! Ben-Hadad approves their plan, and a deal is struck. The Israelite cities taken earlier are returned, and Ahab is given trading privileges in Damascus.
- F.** Ben-Hadad is set free in verse 34. Inexplicably, Ahab makes a treaty with this long-term foe who has twice sought to destroy Ahab and his people. Once again, Ahab is unable to act when action is required. I doubt things would have turned out quite so well for Ben-Hadad had Jezebel been around following the battle.

11. 1 Kings 20:35-43

- A.** It was after the walls of Jericho fell that Achan troubled Israel by keeping items that had been set apart for destruction. Similarly, after the walls of Aphek fall, Ahab spares the life of Ben-Hadad, even though that King had been set apart for destruction. Like Saul, Ahab released a king whom God had determined should die.
1. Ahab's leniency toward Ben-Hadad was probably motivated by his appraisal of the troubled political situation. He preferred to have someone he could control in power rather than some unknown quantity. He may also have had his eye on the Assyrians and hoped that the Syrians would assist him in that conflict.

2. But of course we already know what God wanted – he had told Elijah to anoint Hazael as king in place of Ben-Hadad.
- B.** Finally, Ahab is tricked by an unnamed prophet into pronouncing judgment upon himself.
1. The prophet asks a man to strike him in verse 35 and when he refuses, the prophet tells him that he will be killed by a lion as soon as he departs. The quick lesson from this quick but dramatic event is that God's word must be obeyed!
 2. Not surprisingly, the second man quickly (and perhaps even gladly) strikes the prophet when requested. And, as hoped, the prophet now appears as if he had been wounded in battle and had escaped.
 3. He also pulls his headband down over his eyes. The purpose of this disguise is obscure. Did Ahab know this prophet? Did some of the prophets have distinguishing marks on their faces?
- C.** The disguised prophet tells the king a story: "I went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.' While I was busy here and there, the man disappeared."
1. Merciless Ahab tells the disguised prophet that he has pronounced his own sentence, at which time the prophet removes his headband and is immediately recognized as a prophet. He then tells the king "You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people."
 2. Ahab was the one who had allowed the prisoner to escape – and it was Ahab who would pay with his own life.
 3. Ahab walks away sullen and angry. Ahab's propensity for pouting will be seen again in the next two chapters.

12. Lesson for Today

- A.** If we had to choose one lesson for today from these chapters, it would be hard to find a better one than what we learn from the still small voice of God in Chapter 19. God wanted Elijah to know that His will did not always involve the spectacular; it sometimes involved the ordinary. And this is an important lesson for us as well – particularly during a time in which miracles have ceased.

- B.** As Christians, the vast majority of our service to God takes place in our quiet, routine, humble obedience to his will.
- C.** We may think that if we aren't doing great, spectacular, extraordinary activities for God then we aren't really doing anything for God, but that is not true at all. It is in our ordinary, routine, day-to-day living that we truly prove whether we are God's faithful servants.
1. And isn't it true that the ordinary, routine, day-to-day obedience is often the most difficult obedience of all?
 2. Any idiot can face a crisis; it is this day-to-day living that wears you out. (Anton Chekhov)
 3. But what good, we ask, does it do God if we simply lead quiet, godly lives while we are surrounded all about with sin and rebellion?
 4. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
 5. (Psalm 46:10) Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.
 6. (Micah 6:7-8) Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
 7. God wants our obedience – not our greatness. We, like Elijah, may be blessed by God to have a spectacular mountain-top experience, but like countless others we may not. Instead, our service to God may be to spend our entire lives in quiet, faithful obedience to his will. But then again, what could be more spectacular than to live a quiet, Godly life in the world of sin and immorality that surrounds us?