

ELIJAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD: ENCOURAGED, CHALLENGED

1 KINGS 19:09–18

Introduction

How often have you faced disappointment? Discouragement? Despair? At one time or another, every human being faces disappointment. And most of us have felt discouraged at some point in our lives. But despair and despondency are emotions that fewer of us experience. Sometimes a person's despair can be so deep that he or she loses heart and feels utterly hopeless. Under the weight and burden of despair, the person's heart begins to faint and to sense total defeat. Such feelings can lead to long periods of depression and sometimes even to suicide.

This is the practical subject being discussed in the present Scripture. One of the strongest men to ever serve God, the prophet Elijah, was gripped by a spirit of discouragement and despair. But the wonderful news that was proclaimed to him and is still being proclaimed to us today is this: the LORD will meet our need and deliver us from the spirit of discouragement and despair. Empowering us to conquer these crises in life, the LORD will save and deliver us. This is: *The Escape of Elijah from Jezebel: Being Saved by the Living God from Disappointment, Discouragement, and Despair*, 1 Kings 19:1-21.

- I. Elijah's flight from Jezebel: discouraged, disappointed (vv. 1-8).
- II. Elijah's encounter with the LORD: encouraged, challenged (vv. 9-18).
- III. Elijah's call to Elisha: surrendered, obeyed (vv. 19-21).

1 Kings 19: 09–18 Elijah's Encounter with the LORD: Encouraged, Challenged

There was Elijah's encounter with the LORD, an encounter that encouraged and challenged the dear prophet of God. After arriving at Mt. Sinai, Elijah went into a cave. In the Hebrew, the definite article "the" is used to indicate "the cave." This fact could be significant, for it could be referring to some particular cave that Moses had used when he was confronted by God on Mt. Sinai (see notes, Exo 19:1-25). Whatever the case, Elijah went into a particular cave and spent the night. What then happened is a strong encouragement to the heart of any believer who is experiencing discouragement, despair or hopelessness. Scripture graphically describes Elijah's experience:

1. Either while he was sleeping or right after he awoke, Elijah was confronted by the LORD with a very specific question: What was he doing there at Mt. Sinai (vv.9-10)? Filled with despair, Elijah responded that he had faithfully served the LORD, but the people had not responded to his challenge. Instead, they had rejected God's covenant, destroying His worship centres and killing the LORD's prophets. Now only he was left among God's prophets, and the Israelites were trying to kill him too.
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Note how Elijah felt all alone, as though he were the only person in the nation who was serving God. He felt defenceless, helpless against the threat of the evil Queen Jezebel. His discouragement was blinding him to the truth of God's presence and His power to deliver His people from the hands of all enemies.

2. Not responding to Elijah's complaint, the LORD invited His dear servant to come out of the cave and stand in His presence (vv. 11-13). Once outside, several spectacular events occurred rapidly. But note: God was not present. He did not meet Elijah's need through these spectacular events.
 - => A ferocious wind-storm struck the mountains, a wind-storm so fierce that the mountains were split apart and rocks were shattered. But the LORD's presence was not in the wind.
 - => After the wind-storm, an earthquake shook the mountain. But again, the LORD's presence was not in the earthquake.
 - => After the earthquake, a blazing fire erupted on the mountain. But the LORD was not in the dramatic fire (v. 12). In past history, the LORD had used all three of these events to symbolize His presence (Exo 19:16-18; Jud 5:4-5; 2 Sam 22:8-16; Psa 18:7-15; 68:8; Heb 12:18). But not this time, not in confronting Elijah. Why? Because Elijah was being used by God to perform spectacular miracles before the people as a demonstration of God's enormous power, events to prove that the LORD is the only true and living God. Obviously, Elijah had begun to depend upon the sensational and to expect repentance due to the amazing events. But it is seldom God's way to reach people through incredible demonstrations of His power. Usually, He moves upon hearts with a still small voice. This, Elijah had to learn.

Some time after the spectacular events, there was the quiet, gentle whisper of God's voice (vv. 12-13). During the whisper, Elijah was gripped with shame and humbled himself before the LORD. Broken, he pulled his cloak over his face. Slowly but surely, Elijah was learning the great lesson that God reveals Himself by speaking to the spirit, the heart of man. And it is through the movement of the heart that God convicts and moves a person to repentance. Elijah should not expect people to respond to events such as wind-storms, earthquakes, and fires just because they are extraordinary or sensational. For it was the Voice, the Word of God, that convicted people and aroused them to forsake their sin and turn to Him. The lesson was clear: it would be His Word that would change the hearts of the people. Thus, what the people needed was the Word of the LORD proclaimed by Elijah. If Elijah would arise and go forth carrying the voice of God — His Holy Word — to the people, they would respond. At least some of them would.

3. To stir Elijah to arise and return to the people with a new mission, the LORD forcefully repeated His question. Once again He asked Elijah what he was doing there at Mt. Sinai. Still not aroused, Elijah responded the very same as he had before:

he had been very zealous in serving the LORD God Almighty, the God of hosts. But the Israelites had rejected God's covenant, destroyed His worship centres, and killed God's prophets (vv. 13-14). Then with the same spirit of hopelessness still gripping his soul, Elijah responded once again that he alone was left and that the Israelites were now trying to kill him as well.

4. With compassion and gentleness, the LORD met Elijah's need: He gave him a new task and encouraged him (vv. 15-17). With obvious intensity and power in His voice, the LORD instructed Elijah to get up and go back the very same way he had come, going to the Desert of Damascus. There he was to anoint Hazael as king of Aram or Syria. Then he was to anoint Jehu as king over Israel. Finally, he was to anoint Elisha as his own successor. Note why: these three leaders would complete the task that Elijah had begun, the task of purging Baal worship from the land (v. 17). What a word of encouragement to God's dear servant! His mission had not been a failure; it was being carried out *step by step* by the power of the LORD Himself as he appointed other leaders to continue the task.
5. Also note that the LORD corrected and encouraged Elijah even more by revealing that he was not alone, not the only believer who was fully and totally committed to the LORD. In fact, there were 7,000 other faithful followers of the LORD who had never bowed the knee to engage in the false worship of Baal (v. 18).

Thought 1. Experiencing discouragement, despair and hopelessness, losing heart and running away from the LORD — all these emotions were flooding Elijah's mind, body and soul, coursing through his very veins. He desperately needed to be encouraged and rechallenged by the LORD. He needed to know that he had not been a failure in the task assigned to him. And he needed a new task, a renewed purpose in order to continue ministering.

God met Elijah's need and He will meet our need. For no matter what we experience, God never leaves us alone. He is always present to encourage us and to guide us as we walk step-by-step. God will strengthen us to conquer discouragement and all other emotions that break us and pull us down. God will not leave us down, dejected and defeated, wondering what is the sense of continuing on with life. Therefore, in such discouraging moments, we must learn to turn to the LORD. Crying out to Him in prayer, we must lay the burdens of our heart upon Him. If we will open up and reveal our true emotions to Him, He will bring peace and encouragement to our hearts. Either He will confirm that the path we are walking or the mission we have undertaken is correct or He will give us a whole new mission and purpose in life.

Once we have prayed, we must turn to the Word of God and find out how He tells us to live. And we must live exactly as He says. If we are searching His Word and living as He says, obeying and following His commandments, praying and seeking His face day by day, the LORD will be present with us and guide us step-by-step. We will come

to know the victorious life, conquering all the discouraging, despairing trials of life. No hardship or misfortune will overcome us. But through Christ, we will become “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37).

Mat 10:30-31 *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

2 Tim 4:18 *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Gen 28:15 *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*

Deut 33:27 *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’*

2 Chr 16:9 *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war.*

Psa 18:35 *You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.*

Psa 34:7 *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*

Psa 91:4 *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

Psa 115:12 *The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron.*

Psa 121:4 *Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isa 41:13 *For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."*

Isa 46:4 *Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. ■*