

## **Lesson Five: I Kings 19**

Objective: In I Kings 19, we encounter the unexpected. We will look at how Elijah acts in an unexpected way after God's spectacular revealing of His power on Mount Carmel. We will see how God treats Elijah in his discouragement and exhaustion. We will discuss God's unexpected way of revealing Himself to Elijah.

We will explore what other events have taken place on and around Mount Horeb, how God has revealed Himself there in the past. We will think about ways we can relate to Elijah's discouragement and be encouraged by the way God tenderly cares for Elijah.

**How did chapter 18 end?**

**Now that Yahweh has shown himself to be God, now that the prophets of Baal have been killed, now that rain has come to the land by the word of the Lord, what do we expect to happen next? If this were a movie or a book, what would happen?**

**Read I Kings 19:1-2**

We might expect that Ahab will turn to God at this point - not only had God proved himself to be God by sending down fire to consume His altar, but also God proved himself to be God by sending rain on the land at His word. Before God sent the rain,

the prophets of Baal were killed. Baal exhibited no power - He did not send fire, he did not send rain. His messengers were no more. The people of Israel on Mount Carmel all said, "The Lord - he is God! The Lord - he is God!" This seems like the obvious time for Ahab to turn his life over to God or at least to recognize that Yahweh is the true God of Israel.

Instead, we get a picture of a child tattling, "Listen to what Elijah did!" Ahab tells Jezebel what Elijah did, and Jezebel shows herself to be the one who takes control. There is almost a telenovela or soap opera aspect to this part of the chapter...Instead of a scene like one might find in an action movie, where Jezebel would send an assassin to kill Elijah, instead, she sends a messenger to Elijah to tell him that she will kill him tomorrow.

**Ahab is remembered in history as being a powerful king, but who called the shots in chapter 18? Who is calling the shots now? Does the author of Kings see Ahab as a powerful, competent king?**

**Describe the Elijah that we know so far - what is he like?**

He is a hero of faith, faithful, confident, authoritative. He confronts a powerful leader with sin, calls on people to be faithful to God, brings about miracles through prayer - even raising the dead. He is bold!

**Discuss Elijah's experience in chapter 18. How do we expect Elijah to feel and act at this point in the story?**

Shouldn't Elijah be triumphant? The God that he follows, the God he stands up for, works for, trusts, has just triumphed over Baal in a public way. The people of Israel have acknowledged that Yahweh is God. The prophets of Baal are dead. Elijah outran a chariot! You would think Elijah would have no doubts in God's strength and protection. You would think that Elijah would trust that since God has taken care of him so far, He will continue to do so. Instead I Kings 19:3 says, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."

**Why do you think he responded this way?**

**Have you ever been afraid or doubted God even when He had proven Himself to be trustworthy? If you are comfortable, please describe your experience with this kind of fear or doubts.**

**Read I Kings 19:3—5a**

Elijah flees for his life by traveling to Beersheba, the southernmost town in the land. The narrator reminds the reader that Beersheba is under Judah's control. Even though Elijah is legally beyond Jezebel's control, he still continues on into the wilderness.

**What picture do we get of Elijah in the wilderness? What is his state of mind?**

**What does he ask God to do?**

His cry under the solitary desert bush can be translated, “Too much!” or “I have had enough.” or “It is enough!” (Keck, et al, 1999) Even though he had tremendous success on Mount Carmel, he is now discouraged and weary.

We hear a similar cry from Moses in Numbers 11 after the people were complaining about only having manna to eat. Moses says in **Numbers 11:14, 15**, **“I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes —and do not let me face my own ruin.”**

How many of us have felt this way before? It is ENOUGH, Lord. It is TOO much.

We see signs in Elijah of burnout, signs of depression. Elijah has been blessed with much success but at the slightest sign of a reversal of fortune, he is ready to quit (Keck, et al, 1999).

**Read I Kings 19:5b-7**

**How does God respond to Elijah’s request?**

We see God respond with gentleness, kindness and understanding. We might expect God to say, “Elijah, don’t you trust me? Don’t you know that I will take care of you?” Instead, he sends an angel to wake him up and to feed him.

For the original reader, the word “angel” would heighten the tension of the passage because the word “angel” is the same one used for Jezebel’s messenger in verse two - the reader is momentarily uncertain whether this mysterious intermediary will bring death, which Jezebel has promised and Elijah has requested or if the intermediary will deliver Elijah from his persecutor and from himself (Keck, et al, 1999).

The word “jar” in the “jar of water” that the angel provides Elijah is only found two other times in the Old Testament - one of those times being in I Kings 17:8-16, where the widow’s jar provided for Elijah. So, we see that here in the desert the Lord is continuing to provide for Elijah.

The second time the angel speaks to Elijah, he says, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you” echoing Elijah’s complaint of “It is too much!” Elijah must accept nourishment from the Lord.

**Does this story and feeding by angels remind you of a story in the New Testament?**

**Have you ever had a time when you felt like, “It is too much!”? Have you ever felt spiritually/physically discouraged even if it did not make sense? If you are comfortable, please describe a time you felt this way.**

Notice that God does not rebuke Elijah for his exhaustion or discouragement. Instead He provides for Elijah as He has many times in the past...with food and with rest.

**What does this tell us about God? What does this tell us about how we should minister to others who are discouraged? Does this offer any encouragement for our own discouragement and exhaustion?**

**Read I Kings 19:8-10**

Elijah travels on that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

**Let's discover other times Mount Horeb has appeared in scripture: (In scripture, Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai are the same mountain, which is also called “the Mountain of the Lord”**

Exodus 3:1-4:17 - Mount Horeb is where Moses encountered God through the burning bush; God tells Moses in Exodus 3:12, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

Exodus 19 - Israel camped around it, instructed that the mountain is holy; Moses went up the mountain

Exodus 24 - Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up the mountain and saw God; Moses stays on mountain 40 days and 40 nights with the Lord

Deuteronomy 5:1-4 Moses summoned all Israel and said, "Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our ancestors[a] that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain."

Exodus 33 - the people strip off their ornaments by Mount Horeb as God decides what to do about them in their disobedience; Moses asks to see God's glory. Scholars believe that he is on Mount Horeb when God tells him to "stand on a rock" and says, "I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by." (Exodus 33:18-23)

Exodus 34 - Moses receives the second set of the 10 commandments; Moses spends 40 days and 40 nights with God there, neither eating or drinking while he is there

**Let's see ways God has appeared in the past on Mount Horeb/Mount Sinai:**

Exodus 3:1, 2 - in a burning bush

Exodus 19:18, 19 “Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder.” (NRSV)

Exodus 24:9 “ and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.” (NRSV)

Exodus 24:17 “Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel”

### **Scriptures on Moses encountering God on the mountain:**

Exodus 3, 4 - Burning bush

Exodus 19:20 “When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”

Exodus 24:18 - “Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”

Exodus 34:28 “He was there with the lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.”

Deut. 9, 10 also reference Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Horeb

I wonder what drove Elijah to Mount Horeb, such a great distance away! It certainly seems to be an echo of Moses, including the forty days and forty nights that Elijah



traveled without food or water echoing Moses' forty days and forty nights without food on the mountain with God. Is it possible that Elijah felt so alone that he thought the only place to encounter God was on this holy mountain?

**What does God ask Elijah? What is Elijah's response? What seems strange about Elijah's response?**

The word for "zealous" is the same as the word for "jealous" when God is "jealous" of Israel's loyalty. Elijah is jealous on God's part, angry because he has been left by himself to do God's work and because he is persecuted for it.

It seems odd that after the scene on Mount Carmel, where the people had worshipped God, saying, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God." that Elijah would now complain about the Israelites unwillingness to follow God. He has not only forgotten that the Israelites want to follow God but also that Obadiah saved 100 prophets, so Elijah is not the ONLY prophet left.

**In what way can you relate to Elijah's discouragement? Does discouragement always make sense? Is it possible to not be susceptible to discouragement?**

**Read I Kings 19:11-18**

**When the Lord says he is going to pass by, what do you think Elijah expects?**

**How did God reveal Himself on Mount Carmel? How did God reveal Himself to Moses on the Mountain?**

The Lord is not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire. Instead, God reveals Himself in the “sound of sheer silence” (NRSV) or a “gentle whisper” (NIV). It is in this stillness, this quiet, that Elijah encounters the Lord.

With Moses, the Lord often revealed Himself through fire, through lightning and thunder. Also on Mount Carmel, God shows His power through fire and lightning and thunder. However, in this instance, God reveals Himself through the quiet. The wind, earthquake and fire may have reminded Elijah of God’s power, but His voice was heard in the quiet.

We might like God to consistently show Himself in one way. We might like Him to always be a cloud for us during the day and a pillar of fire at night; we might like Him to always reveal Himself to us in storms or in fire - but God does not limit Himself either to the spectacular OR to the quiet. God reveals Himself in all kinds of ways. Sometimes God’s “voice” can be present even in the silence, as in the birth of a child to an unwed mother or in the death of an innocent man on the cross (Keck, et al, 1999).

**What does it say about Elijah that he could discern God’s voice in the quiet? Did his past obedience and trust and time spent with God “pay off” even during this time when he felt that he was alone?**

**Can you think of a time when God has revealed Himself in a spectacular way to you? Can you think of a time when God has revealed Himself in a quiet/subtle way to you or when His voice was present in the silence?**

God asks Elijah again what he is doing there, and Elijah's answer stays the same.

**What are things we might expect God to tell Elijah at this point?**

Things God does not say: Why are you so burned out? Don't you trust me? What kind of horrible prophet are you? OR I will wipe out everyone in Israel. I will wipe out Ahab and Jezebel right away.

**What does God tell Elijah to do?**

God is so patient with Elijah! He gives Elijah a job. It is interesting that the Lord does not tell Elijah that He will take care of Jezebel or that there will something else happen like what happened on Mt. Carmel. Instead, he gives Elijah instructions on who to anoint. This time, God chooses to work through the unspectacular work of prophetic succession (Keck, et al, 1999). We often want big flashy answers, but sometimes God chooses to work quietly behind the scenes.

God also assures Elijah that there will be 7,000 left in Israel who have not bowed to Baal. Elijah is not alone in his following of God.

## **Conclusion:**

Even Elijah faces burnout, exhaustion, and discouragement. How many of us have felt like we too are the only ones left - even when we are not? The Lord understands our exhaustion and provides for us during these times when we are paralyzed by our own discouragement. He is patient and merciful to Elijah as he is patient and merciful to us. The mystery of God is evident in this chapter as we see God respond in unexpected ways...revealing Himself in the stillness and quiet, patiently responding to Elijah over and over, giving Elijah something ordinary to do instead of something bold. Elijah is able to hear God, and we must be able to be quiet and ready to hear Him in the quiet - and be able to recognize Him when He shows up more spectacular ways. God is not limited by our expectations.