

1ST KINGS

Week 31, chapter 19

For the moment, Jezebel seems to have won. She could easily replace those 450 prophets of Ba'al that were killed on Mt. Carmel at the order of Elijah, so just because of their deaths she wasn't at all deterred from her commitment to make Ba'al Israel's god. After all, these were phony prophets of a false god in the first place, so it was just a matter of her appointing some new ones, of which there was a generally endless supply.

Her real success, however, was that she finally managed to get Elijah out of her hair by issuing a threat on his life and in response he immediately fled from the northern kingdom. What Elijah didn't know was that the death threat was actually intended to get him to abandon his mission field (Israel), perhaps even resign his commission as a prophet of YHWH, and to leave. Killing him would have been quite problematic for this evil Queen, as Elijah was now popular among the people of Israel. At this point it appears that her plan worked because chapter 19 has a devastated and despondent ***Eliyahu*** taking his assistant with him and hastening to the southernmost city of Be'er Sheva in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Let's pick up with the narrative at verse 3.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 19:3 – end

Quite literally Elijah wanted to die. But why? If he truly wanted death, he only had to remain in Israel and Jezebel would have happily accommodated him. After all he supposedly fled from Jezebel's threat in order to avoid her taking his life. To this we don't get a direct answer except that he says he may as well die because, "I'm no better than my ancestors". In his

current depressed and defeated state of mind, he essentially questioned the worth of his God-given gifting as a prophet since by all outward appearances he, and God's mission for him, was a failure.

When he says he was like his ancestors, he didn't mean that he came from a line of prophets. Prophets weren't like priests; while priests were priests according to a specific blood line, prophets were individually anointed by God without regard to their lineage. So a prophet didn't usually come from a family of prophets, although it apparently did occur and the Bible gives us a handful of examples. We don't know anything about his ancestors but apparently they were just ordinary Israelites and hadn't received this great honor of a high calling that **Eliyahu** had.

But in this weak moment of self-pity, fear, exhaustion and discouragement he is discounting this enormous and unmerited gift of being an anointed messenger of God's oracle to a king and to God's people. And so he decides that since death comes to all men no matter what, this lonely desert place, under a broom tree, would be a good place to give up his spirit and end his earthly trials; better than some tortuous death at the hands of Jezebel. Elijah had no illusions about dying and having an afterlife with the Heavenly Father. As far as he reckoned this would be the end of his existence especially so far as we know he never married and so had no sons to carry on his spiritual essence within them.

As he lay there riling on these dark thoughts he fell asleep under the shade of this retama tree when shortly an angel touched him and he awoke. Prophets usually received their instructions from the Lord by means of dreams and visions. Sometimes it seemed to occur by some indefinable unction of the Spirit that welled up from within and came without speech or vision. But here a **malach** (an angel) appears and tells him to get up and eat, so that Elijah's strength would be restored. There before him was a cake baked by hot stones, and a flask of water. The cake is in Hebrew **uggah** and it specifically means the kind of bread that is usually flat bread baked in the shape of a disc. It is the kind that Bedouins typically make because cake-like loaves require time for the dough to rise, and then must be cooked in an oven and not over an open campfire.

After eating and having some water he fell asleep again and a little later was awakened a 2nd time by this same angel. What is interesting however is that in this verse this angel is identified as the Angel of the Lord; **malach Yehoveh**. I don't know why the CJB omits this mention of Angel of the Lord and merely says "angel" instead, because clearly most other Bible versions add "of the Lord", and it is there in the original Hebrew. In any case, here Elijah encounters not an ordinary angel, but some manifestation of God Himself. Recall that it was the Angel of the Lord that appeared to Moses in the burning bush on Mt. Sinai and claimed to be the Great I

am. And so not surprisingly, this Angel of the Lord influenced Elijah to trek to Mt. Sinai, or as it says here, Horeb (Horeb and Mt. Sinai are interchangeable terms).

Just to revisit momentarily this issue of the identity of the Angel of the Lord; an ordinary angel is never referred to with God's formal name attached. Rather an ordinary angel is either simply **malach** or **malach elohim** (**elohim** is a generic word that can indicate any god or if the context warrants it, it can mean specifically the Hebrew God). These typical **malachim** (the plural form of the word angel) invariably made it clear that whatever they spoke or instructed they were simply delivering a message, as a servant, from God. They did not claim authorship of the words and did not speak their message in the 1st person (I, me).

However when we see the term **malach Yehoveh** in the Bible then we see this special angel acting and speaking upon his own authority. He DOES speak in the 1st person (I, me). In his delivery of this divine oracle to the weary Elijah, this angel that touched him more or less says "I say" thus and so, not "God said" thus and so. This angel speaks with self-authority. So the Angel of the Lord is clearly one of several mysterious manifestations of God that doesn't neatly fall within the commonly defined Trinitarian Doctrine that strictly limits all of God's possible manifestations to three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have since early in the Bible been introduced to one manifestation of God called the Shekinah, and yet another called the Angel of the Lord. So as much as we all would like to characterize God by tying Him up in a nice simple bundle and labeling it the Trinity, it isn't quite that easy. Can we sing to God and worship Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Absolutely! But let's not think that those simple manmade words somehow capture the alpha and omega of God's nature or of His manifestations. Those words are merely expressions of truth that acknowledges God's simultaneous plurality and oneness, and that our Savior is indeed God.

As Rabbi Baruch is fond of telling us, numbers in the Bible have great significance and the number 40 is symbolic of transition. Thus **Eliyahu** travels 40 days and nights until he comes to Mt. Horeb and the end result is going to be some kind of transition. Some commentators say that it took that long because he didn't know where he was going; he just wandered and Horeb is where he providentially wound up. Others say that he knew where to go, but not how to get there, so it took him an inordinately long time. Either of those solutions seems like an improbable stretch. In my view, he knew exactly where he was going, but went slowly and deliberately and likely because he needed the time of personal solitude.

He also, no doubt, didn't go 40 days without further food and water. So we're not to take the words "on the strength of that meal he traveled 40 days and 40 nights" to mean that he had nothing more to eat for nearly 6 weeks. Rather, it was that the meal gave him the burst of

physical and mental energy needed to take on the task of an arduous journey through desert country to Mt. Horeb. We've all had the experience of being so tired and hungry that we became lethargic and just wanted to sit. But after some sleep and a meal, we are refreshed and have a more optimistic attitude.

And as I have discussed with you before, this Mountain of God (Mt. Sinai, Mt. Horeb) was not in the Sinai Peninsula where the St. Katherine Monastery stands today; rather it was on the Arabian Peninsula, on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba (which, by the way, would be of approximately equal journey time from Be'er Sheva whether it was the traditional Mt. Sinai or the real one in Arabia).

In verse 9 he arrives at Horeb and goes into "the cave". The Hebrew say THE cave, not A cave. In other words, there was a well known cave or crag there and probably an occasional ascetic holy man would go there as a pilgrimage. This cave is thought by many Bible scholars to be the same place as the "cleft in the rock" where Moses hid as God passed by.

Exodus 33:17-23 CJB

17 ADONAI said to Moshe, "I will also do what you have asked me to do, because you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

18 But Moshe said, "I beg you to show me your glory!"

19 He replied, "I will cause all my goodness to pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce the name of ADONAI. Moreover, I show favor to whomever I will, and I display mercy to whomever I will."

20 But my face," he continued, "you cannot see, because a human being cannot look at me and remain alive."

21 Here," he said, "is a place near me; stand on the rock."

22 When my glory passes by, I will put you inside a crevice in the rock and cover you with my hand, until I have passed by."

23 Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back, but my face is not to be seen."

Elijah spent the night in the cave and sometime during the night Yehoveh came to him and asked a very pointed question: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Let's not forget that he was directed to come to this place by the Angel of the Lord, who is a manifestation of God. So the question is not meant in the sense of God being surprised that **Eliyahu** showed up, and wants to know what brings him here. Obviously the all-powerful Yehoveh knew why Elijah was there. Rather the question was meant for Elijah to ponder at a deeper level in his soul, but also it was to open a conversation. To me the question carried with it (on one level) a sense of: why are you here in the middle of nowhere, when I assigned you as My Prophet to the people of the Kingdom of Israel? Why did you leave the mission field and the holy vocation that I gave to you?

Eliyahu answered in a way entirely unbecoming for a prophet of God; let alone one through whom God had done such incredible miracles and loaned such terrible power. Nonetheless it was an honest answer that revealed an unwelcome flaw in Elijah. Elijah offered God little more than a gripe session. He complained to God. It reminds one a bit of Na'omi as she explained that God had given her a bitter life by means of the deaths of her husband and both of her male children. It reminds one of David complaining on more than one occasion about how alone he felt, or how devastated he felt, and wondered why the Lord permitted such a thing.

Complaining to God is OK and generally speaking is not sin. The thing is, however, that we should never see our complaints to Him as a sign of merit on our part; that we have the attitude that we're just being honest and thus an honest complaint is a good complaint. Complaining to God means we disagree with God, or we think He should have rescued us by now, or He should never have allowed the bad situation we're in to develop in the first place. And Elijah says that the Lord needs to understand that he has always displayed great zealousness for Yehoveh (in other words, he's expressing personal merit). And despite this great zeal for God that has cost him so dearly, the people of Israel still break the covenant of God (meaning the Mosaic Covenant) by committing idolatry, they have broken down the altars used to honor Yehoveh and instead built altars to Ba'al. God's people whom He sent the prophets to in hopes the people would see their wickedness and repent rather than face God's judgment, killed the messengers. And despite the incredible miracles that happened on Carmel, now Elijah sees himself as "the last one", and he is as good as dead.

Embedded in this gripe session is **Eliyahu's** scathing diatribe against God's people. The implication is that because the people of the northern kingdom had treated Elijah and other prophets so badly, and they had completely turned their backs on God's Torah in favor of worshipping false gods, then the Lord needed to pour out His wrath upon them. Elijah even exaggerates by saying that he is the only one left among the prophets (which is not true).

It's interesting to me that what Elijah did was to view his predicament as an "us versus them" matter. He was righteous, but the rest of God's people were not. Therefore God ought to inflict righteous national judgment on "them" (but of course he ought to be exempted). What is also interesting is that close to 1000 years later this event and Elijah's requests for God to terminate all efforts toward gaining the repentance of the 10 northern tribes and instead repudiating His people, was well remembered in the minds of the Israelites. In Romans 11, St. Paul actually quotes Elijah to make a point:

Rom 11:1-5 CJB

CJB Romans 11:1 "In that case, I say, isn't it that God has repudiated his people?" Heaven forbid! For I myself am a son of Isra'el, from the seed of Avraham, of the tribe of Binyamin.

² God has not repudiated his people, whom he chose in advance. Or don't you know what the Tanakh says about Eliyahu? He pleads with God against Isra'el,

³ "ADONAI, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I'm the only one left, and now they want to kill me too!"

⁴ But what is God's answer to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not knelt down to Ba'al."

⁵ It's the same way in the present age: there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

It is for the sake of the remnant that God will NEVER be done with His people. Not a gentile remnant, a Hebrew remnant. That is the context of Elijah's complaint, and it is the context of Paul's rebuttal. Those 7,000 of Israel who remained faithful (from 1st Kings 19 verse 18) were sufficient to keep God from repudiating His people altogether. And how were they chosen? By grace. They weren't perfect, they didn't obey the Torah without flaw; rather, they simply trusted God and refused to take up idol worship. Whoa, I thought grace was a New Testament dispensation? Here Paul explains that just as it was by God's grace that the 7,000 were chosen in Elijah's time, so it is by the same grace that there is (in Paul's day) a chosen Hebrew remnant who have remained faithful by accepting Yeshua.

Thus even the Lord's greatest prophet who pled for God to close the books on His chosen people was refused his request because as long as there remained a faithful remnant, God said would not be done with them. Now if God says that's the case, and if Paul says that's the case, why is it a standard Christian doctrine that God IS done with His chosen people and has replaced them with the gentile church? It is because the church is as confused and wrong minded and jealous that God would continue to call to His chosen people (despite their stony hearts) as was the great Elijah (so we're in pretty good company).

Here was Elijah's problem: he had not seen the fruits of his works and sufferings. The success he assumed would happen, didn't. And now he comes before the Lord and basically wonders why the Lord would put him through all that for nothing, and since the people didn't respond then God should just give up on them because Elijah has. Elijah gave up on the people and abandoned the mission field where they lived. The moral of the story is that our job as disciples of Yeshua, regardless in what capacity, is always to be obedient to the Lord, to follow the Lord, and then let the chips fall where they may. Immediate (even near term) earthly success is not always the sign that we have done things God's way or achieved what the Lord sought from us. Conversely not seeing near term success is by no means the sign of our failure. But nothing is more human than to feel otherwise. Rather our obedience is our only guarantee that we are properly fulfilling our assignment.

In verse 11 God tells ***Eliyahu*** to go back into the cave and wait and watch. Suddenly a mighty blast of wind tore through the area. That was followed a violent earthquake and then fire broke out. We are told that God was **not in** any of these things. And God says that He is **not in** any of these manifestations of nature. Storms, earthquakes and destructive fire are elements of nature that God controls, but they are not God and God is not them. Further none of these things helps to define His character. Rather these things are used at times for wrath to bring destruction. In fact, this was a common understanding among ancient societies that storms, earthquakes and fire were the wrath of the gods. So the symbolism is that God is NOT going to visit any of these things on His people as Elijah wants Him to do. Rather instead God is going to try to change their course by continuing to show them mercy.

So in verse 13, after God has demonstrated His control over storms, earthquakes and fire now suddenly a quiet, still voice spoke to Elijah. Being quiet and gentle IS in God's nature and character. Being patient in seeking His people to repent and turn away from their sins is His nature. So when Elijah perceived this gentle voice, he knew that any danger had passed and that he could safely step outside the protection of the cave.

Did Elijah get it now? Did he finally understand that the Lord will not repudiate His people but

instead will give them even more time to repent? As a test Yehoveh repeats the question He first asked Elijah, to see if Elijah has learned anything and has himself repented for feeling as he did and abandoning his God-given assignment. "What are you doing here, **Eliyahu**" the Lord asks. And wouldn't you just know that Elijah replies with exactly the same answer he gave the 1st time. I'm OK, but they aren't. They were mean to me, so you should sow your wrath upon them. It's time to let them go and choose somebody else.

We have come far enough along in the story of Elijah, and you have sufficient information and context, for me to now make a fascinating point for you that the Rabbis note. One of the things that the Lord was trying to teach **Eliyahu** by using the various symbolisms of storm, earthquake and fire and finally a quiet voice was that God's way for prophets and teachers to instruct God's people is calmly and tenderly, not through anger and coercion. And this is because the ways of shalom and not wrath are how God wants to teach His people, guide His people, relate to His people, and to bring His people to repentance when they sin. And Elijah had been guilty of doing the opposite because instead of working through gentle and loving means to change the hearts of the people of Israel (perhaps by teaching them God's Torah or living in a godly way as an example) he instead became angry and impatient and called down a devastating long-term drought on the people.

Notice back in 1st Kings 17 verse 1 we hear this:

CJB 1 Kings 17:1 *Eliyahu from Tishbe, an inhabitant of Gil'ad, said to Ach'av, "As ADONAI the God of Isra'el lives, before whom I stand, there will be neither rain nor dew in the years ahead unless I say so."*

There is no mention of the Lord telling **Eliyahu** to take a harsh message to **Achav** or of the Lord threatening to stop the rains, it's just that most Christians read into it that it was God who ordered it. Rather we hear Elijah make a vow to **Achav** ("as Adonai the God of Israel lives") that it will not rain in the years ahead "unless I say so". This was a rash vow that God eventually overrode for the sake of Israel who was suffering. God had indeed given Elijah unbelievable power and authority to make these kinds of decisions, such that if Elijah ordered the rain to stop, God would grant it and it would stop. And Elijah says that it was not that the rain would start up again when GOD said so, but rather when Elijah determined that the people could receive rain again.

Now look back to 1st Kings 18 verse 1.

^{CJB} **1 Kings 18:1** *A long time passed. Then, in the third year, the word of ADONAI came to Eliyahu: "Go, present yourself to Ach'av, and I will send rain down on the land."*

God is taking the matter out of Elijah's hands. In chapter 17 the "I" is Elijah, and there is no mention of God sending Elijah to **Achav**. In chapter 18 the "I" is Yehoveh and in this case God DOES send Elijah to Achav, and we find that God is going to start the rains again. Elijah could have started the rains at any time, since it was Elijah's prerogative to stop them in the first place. But God, in His mercy, decided that Elijah was being too harsh on His people and so God says that He will show mercy and order the rains to begin again.

This reminds us of when Moses struck the rock out of anger, and then when water poured forth took credit for it. What was the result? God prematurely removed Moses from his position and turned it over to Joshua. Joshua would see the fruits of Moses' earlier efforts, but Moses would not.

And so as we approach the end of chapter 19, we have the Lord instructing **Eliyahu** to anoint a new prophet named **Elisha**. In time we'll find that everything that **Eliyahu** had been assigned to do (after the incident here at the cave on Mt. Horeb), **Elisha** will do instead. Just like the pattern of Moses and Joshua.

So in verse 15, after **Eliyahu** refuses to repent for his bad attitude before the Lord, the Lord sends him away with instructions. He is to go far to the north by the way of Damascus. And when he arrives he is to go to the gentile **Haza'el** and anoint him to be king over Aram (which is generally akin to saying Syria). Then Elijah is to anoint **Yehu**, son of **Nimshi**, to be the new king over Israel. In addition he is to anoint **Elisha** as a prophet who will replace Elijah.

Now we have to understand that in the end, the only thing from this to-do list that Elijah actually accomplished was to anoint his replacement, **Elisha**. It was **Elisha** who would anoint **Haza'el** and **Elisha** would send a disciple to anoint **Yehu**.

Verse 17 is a bit cryptic, but what it is saying is that the king of Aram will lead an army into the northern kingdom of Israel and invade and cause great death and destruction. After that has

happened, **Yehu** King of Israel will oppress and kill his own people. And then after that, **Elisha** the prophet will kill even more of them. But that is not what actually happened. **Yehu** assassinated King **Achav** and killed off his family, and then **Haza'el** invaded Israel later. What it is that **Elisha** would do in this regard is even more problematic. So far as we know **Elisha** didn't kill anybody. We do find in 2nd Kings that bears tore-up a number of young men as a consequence for mocking **Elisha**. And of course as a prophet **Elisha's** job was to exhort and chastise the people to realize their sins and repent, but they refused and many were killed from foreign invaders. So perhaps the intent is that **Elisha** was indirectly associated with the deaths of many from the 10 tribes. That is, because Elisha was God's prophet when he rebuked someone and that person did not heed the rebuke, there was usually a terrible result such as death. In fact the Rabbis say that prophets needed to learn to be very wise and cautious in their dealings with people and to not rebuke them except as a last resort, because the consequences for the rebuked but unrepentant person could be catastrophic.

In verse 19 Elijah obeyed God and went and found **Elisha** and by putting his own personal prophet's cloak on Elisha's shoulders, he designated Elisha to be the next major prophet of Israel. The verse reads poorly in English as though Elisha was plowing a field using a team of 12 oxen. Such a thing is unheard of. Rather the idea is that Elisha's family has 12 teams of plow oxen, 11 were being used by others and he was driving the 12th team.

Elisha immediately understood and accepted his commission as a prophet. When in verse 20 he asks to go and kiss his father and mother good-bye, the Hebrew never says to "kiss them good-bye" but only rather to "kiss them". And this is because in the Middle Eastern culture such a kiss is simply of itself a greeting or a good-bye, nothing more. Elijah told him to go but to be sure to come back "because of what I did to you", meaning to designate Elisha a prophet according to Yehoveh's instructions.

Some see something wrong in **Elisha** going to his parents before following Elijah because it has a familiar ring to it.

Matthew 8:18-22 CJB

¹⁸ *When Yeshua saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.*

¹⁹ *A Torah-teacher approached and said to him, "Rabbi, I will follow you wherever you*

go."

²⁰ *Yeshua said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds flying about have nests, but the Son of Man has no home of his own."*

²¹ *Another of the talmidim said to him, "Sir, first let me go and bury my father."*

²² *But Yeshua replied, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

There is a big difference between **Elisha** saying goodbye to his parents before following Elijah, and the man in the Gospel of Matthew wanting to go home to bury his father. First, a son was under the authority of his father. It would have been shameful for **Elisha** to not first ask for his father's leave to go, and then to show courtesy and respect to his parents by telling them goodbye and explaining why he was leaving.

The man in Matthew who wanted to bury his father simply wanted to wait for a more convenient time before he followed Yeshua as a disciple. It was an excuse to look good to this rabbi, and say all the right things in front of these other men, but not actually do anything. It is not that his father was already dead and needed to be buried; it is that he wanted to go home and wait until some unknown time in the future when his father eventually passed away (as all men do). If his father was actually dead, the young man wouldn't be standing here with Yeshua he'd be sitting **shiva** in his home. Not to be with his family in mourning would be a sinful violation of Torah Law and bring great shame upon him and his family. But this common misunderstanding is what happens when we try to read the New Testament backwards into the Tanach without having carefully studied the Torah and Tanach first.

In order to demonstrate the extreme gravity of what has taken place **Elisha** decided it was appropriate to have a family feast. But what he did was to kill and slaughter his two plow oxen, and then use the wood from the plow yoke as the fire to cook the meat over. By this demonstration he was essentially burning all the bridges to his past. His pleasant life as a field worker in a very well to do family was over. He has enthusiastically traded it for the ascetic and uncertain life of a prophet of God.

Once the ceremonial feast was complete, **Elisha** immediately went to **Eliyahu** and became his apprentice. I said early in the lesson that the 40 days and nights that Elijah traveled to get to Mt. Horeb signaled a transition, and here it is. **Eliyahu**, at Mt. Horeb, had essentially given

notice to resign his calling as a prophet and God was not going to override his will on the matter. There was no joyful victory here in Elijah taking his prophet's mantle off of his shoulders and putting it onto Elisha. It is quite sad in many ways because it is emblematic of so many fine and productive Christian ministries, and dedicated Christian men and women, that at some point lose their way, their enthusiasm, and their first love and become no longer useful for God's Kingdom. The Lord has little choice but to let them go and replace them well before it ever needed to be. And the biggest loss is their own.