

Crash Mountain

1 Kings 19:1-18 June 29, 2025

If you follow Elijah's life, chapter 19 is more than surprising. He seems to act completely out of character. We're shocked to see a total collapse into personal defeat after many stunning victories.

In 1992, the University of Alabama's Crimson Tide football team finished their season as national champions, boasting a 13-0 record.¹ It was a historic run. Turn the page on the record books and you know what you'll find? Alabama's 1993 season officially ended with one win and twelve losses. That's a reversal that raises eyebrows. What happened?

1 Kings 19 feels like that. How do you go from the success of Mt. Carmel to being sidelined on Mt. Horeb? The truth is, if Elijah had made the choice to trust the Lord instead of convincing himself that God would eventually let him down, the flow of his life would've worked out much differently.

We don't look at this text to turn our noses up at someone struggling in a spiritual low point. We pay attention to this text because, as James points out, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He's just like us, we're just like him.² And though we don't typically deal with pagan prophets, angels visits, or fire from heaven, we *do* deal with discouragement, confusion, depression, urges to take the course of our lives in our own hands, and the nagging doubt that God will *eventually* forget to take care of us. So, let's watch Elijah's journey so that we can avoid this route in our own lives.

We open on the city of Jezreel in the northern kingdom of Israel. A torrential rainstorm is soaking every street and structure, but that's *good* news. You see, because the nation's sin, God sent a drought for three and a half years. The land and the people within were dying.

Then, when hope was nearly lost, Elijah faced off against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah - false gods the Israelites were worshipping. In the end, Yahweh showed His power and the pagan prophets were executed and the rain came down.

1 Kings 19:1-2 - Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "May the gods punish me and do so severely if I don't make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow!"

Ahab and Jezebel were *literally* the worst rulers a nation could have. She was as dedicated to Baal as Elijah was to Yahweh.³ That day, the wonder of God's mercy was dampened by her wickedness.

Elijah was *also* in Jezreel. God sent him there, enabling him to outrun Ahab's chariot on the way.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Alabama_Crimson_Tide_football_team

² James 5:17

³ Paul House 1, 2 Kings

Jezebel absolutely wanted Elijah dead, but this is a bluff. His life hadn't always been easy, but God had always kept him safe. Think about it: If she was *really* going to kill him, why would she send a messenger instead of an executioner? She knew how to kill prophets. She had done it many times before. She knew where he was - he's right over there. But she could only send a word.

In her threat, she invokes gods that Elijah has *just proven* don't exist. So, as non-emotional readers, we can see how empty her threats are. We know Elijah is safe. We know she *can't* kill him. But could she *scare* him? Could she flush him out so that he would remove *himself* from her domain?

If you're a Christian, you are *safe* in God's love. You may face hardships, sorrows, adversaries, and the unknown, but no weapon formed against you will succeed. *Nothing* can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,⁴ Who has overcome the world. But, we can do an awful lot to disrupt God's good plan for our lives. We can dive into ditches. We can run *into* snares that cause stumbling, regression, and delay. That's what Jezebel wanted to do to Elijah, and he fell for it.

1 Kings 19-3-4a - ³ Then Elijah became afraid, and immediately ran for his life. When he came to Beer-sheba that belonged to Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ but he went on a day's journey into the wilderness...

We can sympathize with Elijah. He was undoubtedly exhausted, worn down. He was discouraged about the state of his nation. He didn't know if he had the strength to face a new round of conflict. But behind it all was fear - fear that God would let him down. Fear that he was on his own.

And so, he doesn't pray. He doesn't hear from God. He *immediately* ran for his life. Where my text says he became afraid, yours might say he "saw." What was he looking at? The circumstances, the conflict, the stress. Was the *situation* the problem? No - God was the One Who *sent* him to Jezreel, and He didn't do it to kill him. No, what Elijah "saw" was *his own* prediction of the future.

Rather than function as God's seer, he prophesies what *he* thinks is most likely. "Jezebel is gonna get me." That *felt* like the only result for this situation. He gave into doubt and fear and he ran.

He ran all the way out of Israel, down to the kingdom of Judah, but not *just* to Judah, to the southern edge of Judah, but not *just* to the southern border of Judah, even past it out into the wilderness. He's covered a distance of about 100 miles already!⁵

He's not just holed up till the heat blows over - he's calling it quits. He leaves his assistant in Beersheba because he thinks he's not going to need him anymore.

Elijah was no longer thinking *theologically*.⁶ He was thinking politically. He was thinking emotionally. And look where it led him: Alone in the wilderness.

⁴ Romans 8:38-39

⁵ James Smith *The Books Of History*

⁶ *The ESV Study Bible: Notes*

Proverbs 29:25 - ²⁵ The fear of mankind is a snare, but the one who trusts in the LORD is protected.

That spiritual truth is not only for Solomon or Elijah, it's for us today. Do we believe God can be trusted to guide our lives and take care of us along the way? Or do we think our fear knows better?

1 Kings 19:4b-5a - He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. He said, "I have had enough! LORD, take my life, for I'm no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree.

He finally takes a minute to pray. Unfortunately, when he does, he tells God what to do. He makes demands and doesn't wait for a reply. His opening phrase is pretty revealing, "I have had *enough!*"

His emotions are relatable, but we can see how unreliable they are. We see that he has let doubt and worry not just run away with him, but run him away from the Lord's will for his life. He's in disarray and contradiction. He says, "God, I just want to die!" Ok, then why did you run?

Elijah is extremely depressed. Yes, that happens even to God's people. But when we're overcome with sorrow or confusion or doubt the believer must actively choose to trust in God and follow His word, which gives direction and clarity and illumination, *even when we don't feel it.*

Elijah had a *great* track record of following the word of the Lord. Multiple times we read, "The word of the Lord came to him," and then he moved according to God's direction. Our own lives should be the same. That we trust in the Lord and hear from the Lord for the choices we make.

But Elijah was no longer listening to the word of God, he was listening to the worry of his heart.

Perhaps you're facing depression or discouragement today - a problem in some relationship or some crossroads in life. The *Lord* can be trusted with your future. Your heart cannot. Elijah listened to his heart and he cut and run. Cutting and running to go your own way never helps God's people.

Abraham, Isaac, Hagar, David, Elimelech, Naomi, Jonah, John-Mark. Each had instances where they reacted naturally, emotionally, they stopped trusting the Lord's leading, they cut and run, and it was *always* a costly mistake. It always led them into some sort of wilderness, just like Elijah.

1 Kings 19:5b-9a - Suddenly, an angel touched him. The angel told him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ Then he looked, and there at his head was a loaf of bread baked over hot stones, and a jug of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ Then the angel of the LORD returned for a second time and touched him. He said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." ⁸ So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ He entered a cave there and spent the night.

As far off track as Elijah was, the Lord was still with him. And look at what God did for him: He provided for him. He *protected* him. There was no posse on the horizon. Even if there was, Elijah had an angel by his side. God demonstrated He was *right there* in Elijah's situation. Jezebel sent a messenger to frighten him, God sent a messenger to comfort him.

When we give into fear and doubt and run off from God's shepherding of our lives, what does He do? He leaves the 99 to find us. That's what we see here. The Lord says, "Ok, I'm going to intervene and try to help Elijah see he's going the wrong way. I want to not just fill his stomach, I want to heal his heart. I want to show him this isn't about one situation, but about his relationship with Me."

The angel says, "Eat or the journey will be too much for you." That's not only true when it comes to walking from Beersheba to Horeb. Left to ourselves, left to our own wisdom, our own ability, our own effort, the journey of *life* will be too much for us. But God, in His grace, gives us the bread of life and living water for the road ahead.

God has provided *much* for us. His word, His Spirit, His grace, His peace, His presence, the Church to give daily, tangible community. God really does feed and provide and protect and direct us.

Elijah obeyed, but it seems like he dragged his feet. You see, the trip from Beersheba to Horeb should've taken about 12 days.⁷ Elijah took 40. Meanwhile, he offered no thanks or praise to God for what He had provided. He doesn't even speak to the Lord. His emotions have him convinced.

1 Kings 19:9b - Suddenly, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

This is a tender moment. God is patient and gentle with His wandering servant. This is how He approaches us because He wants us to come to a place of understanding and acknowledgment. He doesn't just want to force us into obedience or attitudes. Instead, He *invites* us to work out our salvation. To choose to see things the way He sees them. "What are you doing here when the last thing I asked you to do was go to Jezreel?"

1 Kings 19:10 - ¹⁰ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Armies, but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life."

Some of these things were partially true. But he was leaving a *lot* out. He's looking at his situation through a lens of bitterness and frustration. Frankly, he's accusing God of failing.

Altars *had* been torn down, but the day before he ran from Jezreel, a great multitude of Israelites had repented and proclaimed that the Lord is God and they *rebuilt* His altar.⁸ Many true prophets

⁷ Robert Hubbard *First And Second Kings*, Deuteronomy 1:2

⁸ 1 Kings 18:39

had been murdered, but again, just before being in Jezreel, a faithful believer named Obadiah reported to Elijah how he had hidden 100 prophets from Jezebel.

I alone am left? That's not even a little bit true. How about your servant you abandoned in Beersheba? What about Obadiah? What about those 100 prophets? What about the many who were being caught up in revival after Mt. Carmel - people who *needed* ministry and truth right now while Elijah was on the run?

"I have been zealous." Ok, but in this moment what you're saying is, "I'll be zealous as long as things go the way I want." That's not how faith works. That's not how trusting God works.

1 Kings 19:11-13a - ¹¹ Then he said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the LORD's presence." At that moment, the LORD passed by. A great and mighty wind was tearing at the mountains and was shattering cliffs 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. ¹² After the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a voice, a soft whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

There's a slowness in his obedience.⁹ "Go stand on the mountain." But he waits until the fourth manifestation to go out and stand before the Lord. Still, God is gracious and patient.

Now, in the back of our minds we're convinced that it would be better to see big signs - fires and earthquakes. *Then* we'd know what God wants for us. But this text highlights the fact that God much more often wants to work in quiet ways. A small voice. When He spoke, what did He say?

1 Kings 19:13b - Suddenly, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Exactly the same as before. You see, his situation wasn't really the problem. The conflict wasn't the problem. Elijah's *reaction* was the issue. He was stuck in a pattern of fear, doubt, and resentment.

But, with incredible grace and patience, the Lord *again* reminds Elijah of His power, His provision, His protection, His compassion. So how does Elijah respond?

1 Kings 19:14 - ¹⁴ "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Armies," he replied, "but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life."

It's literally a *verbatim* repetition of what he said before. Essentially he says to God, "I don't want to hear it. I don't like my situation, it's *YOUR* fault, and I'm not going to humble myself to trust You."

⁹ Max Rogland *Elijah And The 'Voice' At Horeb*

He calls out the Israelites for abandoning the covenant. Ok, but where are you, Elijah? You're outside the land of promise. You abandoned your calling. You left God's work because you let your emotions call the shots and you've decided you've had *enough*. Enough trust. enough obedience.

1 Kings 19:15-18 - ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Go and return by the way you came to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶ You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ But I will leave seven thousand in Israel—every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

In response to Elijah saying, "God, You've let me down," the Lord graciously points out, "Actually, I've been and still am working internationally, nationally, and personally in your life. Now I'm telling you, *return*." What about Jezebel? What about the threats? Yeah, those still didn't matter. God told him to go *back* to the conflict, to *back* to the trouble, go *back* to the risk.¹⁰ The Lord was enough for what Elijah needed. He was accomplishing quite a bit not just in Elijah's life, but all over the map.

Meanwhile, Israel *needed* a prophet who believed. Those people who had just turned to God from their idols needed faithful believers around who could show them how to walk with the Lord and Elijah was taking himself out of that opportunity because he enthroned fear in his life.

You and I face conflicts, discouragements, depressions. Those *are* common to our human experience. Feeling those things isn't a failure. Failure is measured by our *response*. Will we cling to God in those dark days or will we flee from Him? Will we allow our emotions to set the course of our lives, or will we trust in the Lord and in the Word He's given us? It was ok that Elijah was afraid. It *wasn't* ok that he allowed his distorted feelings to make his life decisions.

Do you know *why* Alabama finished the 1993 season 1 and 12? It's not because they actually lost, but because they knowingly allowed a player to play who received improper benefits. The record books could've shown their season as 9-3-1, but they made internal choices that led to a forfeiture of all those victories.¹¹ They could've been champs again if they would've done things by the book.

If you're hurting today, discouraged or confused or depressed, the Lord knows and He cares and He loves you. But preach to yourself what is *true*: God can still be trusted with your life, with your future, with your choices. Walk with Him, even if you *feel* like you know better. You don't. Go His way, submit to His provision and direction and standards. Because we want to live spiritually on Mt. Carmel or Mt. Zion, not Mt. Horeb.

¹⁰ John Woodhouse 1 Kings: Power, Politics, And The Hope Of The World

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Alabama_Crimson_Tide_football_team