

“The Fleeing Prophet”  
1 Kings 19:1-10  
(Preached at Trinity, August 22, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 18** we witnessed the almighty power of God as Baal is was shown to be a figment wrought in the corrupted imaginations of men. The prophets of Baal failed in their efforts to call forth Baal and they were executed.
  - A. The unmistakable display of God brought Israel to tremble at His presence. They reaffirmed their commitment to God. Elijah would have been hopeful that Israel had finally returned to their covenant relationship with God.  
**1 Kings 18:39 NAU** - "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."
  - B. When Ahab arrived home he called Jezebel and told her all that had transpired between Elijah and her prophets.  
We can see the depraved heart of Ahab. He was present for the entire scene on Mount Carmel, and yet he says nothing about what God had done. He only spoke of what Elijah had done.  
**1 Kings 19:1 NAU** - "Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword."
2. One might assume that Jezebel would have been stricken with terror at hearing Ahab's words. After all, the evidence of God's overwhelming power was indisputable. But she was unmoved. Like many today, receiving the facts made no difference in her worldview. If the evidence doesn't fit their narrative, they just dismiss it. And it also reminds us that even the blazing truth of the Gospel will fall upon deaf ears unless the Holy Spirit opens the heart.
3. Jezebel's response was murderous.  
**1 Kings 19:2 NAU** - "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."
4. When Elijah received the report from Jezebel he did the reasonable thing – Run!  
**1 Kings 19:3 NAU** - "And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there."
5. Most commentaries speak harshly of Elijah here. They put great emphasis upon his apparent change from bold and courageous to fearful and doubting. Most tend to be quite critical of Elijah's fear.

Matthew Henry writes: “Elijah, hereupon, in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba, v. 3. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab and all the prophets of Baal? Nay, which kept him by his sacrifice when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman.”<sup>1</sup>

Philip Ryken speaks even more harshly – “Elijah was a traitor to the Lord’s cause. Having run off in his own direction, he was absent without leave. He had deserted his post in the middle of the battle. He had abandoned his divine calling at the crucial moment when the spiritual destiny of the whole nation was still hanging in the balance.”<sup>2</sup>

6. It all hinges on **Verse 3** where we read that after Jezebel made her death threat Elijah was smitten with fear and ran for his life.
  - A. This is one of the rare Old Testament cases where there is a textual issue. Some manuscripts use the word for “fear” while others use the word translated “saw.” The NASB translates it “fear” while the KJV translates it “saw.”
  - B. It seems more natural that Elijah “saw” the threat and ran for his life. After all, why should he fear Jezebel’s threat if he actually wanted to die?  
**1 Kings 19:4 NAU** - "came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die,"  
 If Elijah wanted to die he didn’t need to flee. Jezebel would have been more than willing to grant his wish.
7. It seems most accurate as well as reasonable to translate **Verse 3** – “And when he saw he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba”
  - A. The last verse of **Chapter 18** finds Elijah in Jezreel, the place of Ahab’s palace. Beersheba is about 100 miles from Jezreel. In Beersheba Elijah would have been safe from Jezebel’s assassins.
  - B. In **Verse 4** Elijah left Beersheba and made a day’s journey into the wilderness. This also was not likely due to his fear of Jezebel. He was already safe.
  - C. He requests death from the hand of God. Instead, God sends His angel and provides a meal for Elijah. The meal would have the purpose of preserving Elijah’s life in preparation for his lengthy journey,  
**1 Kings 19:7 NAU** - "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you."
  - D. The journey would take him to Horeb, the mountain of God (**Verse 8**). Horeb was about 200 miles south of Beersheba. This mountain was a meeting place with God. It was at Horeb that Moses encountered the burning bush. It was also there that God met with Moses and made His covenant.  
 Horeb and Mount Sinai are the same place.  
**Exodus. 24:12-13 NAU** - "Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup> So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God."

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 512.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 523–524.

8. Why did Elijah go to Horeb? The text tells us. He went under Divine direction.  
 In **Verse 5** an angel comes and tells him to arise and eat. The purpose was to prepare him for the journey.  
 In **Verse 7** we are told it was the “Angel of the LORD.”  
**1 Kings 19:7-8 NAU** - "The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." <sup>8</sup> So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God."
9. Again, most commentators spend much time describing the weakness of Elijah—
- A. They talk much about the change from his boldness with the prophets of Baal to his sudden fear before Jezebel.  
 Philip Ryken: “Elijah ran away from Jezebel, away from the people of God, away from his prophetic calling, away from it all.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. They talk of his self-pity and suicidal hopelessness.
- C. They talk of his prideful arrogance; his exaggerated view of his faithfulness.  
**1 Kings 19:10 NAU** - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
10. The chief approach of most commentators has been to focus on Elijah’s psychological condition of fear which led to his suicidal despondence.  
 There is another, more powerful reason for Elijah’s despondency. As I pointed out earlier, fear was not the primary motivation for Elijah’s actions.  
 He was much more moved by Israel’s apostasy and covenantal faithlessness.  
 Dale Ralph Davis - “I propose that our ‘covenantal’ interpretation yields richer applications than the usual ‘psychological’ approach.”<sup>4</sup>
11. When God reigned down fire from heaven and Israel falling down and declaring God to be the one true God Elijah had hopes that Israel would return to the covenantal faithfulness. With the death of the prophets of Baal he had hoped that Baal worship in Israel had come to an end.  
 But now he came face to face with the continuation of Jezebel’s wickedness and realized that little change had taken place. So he fled and cried out for God to end his life.
12. We find here God’s gracious interaction with His prophet, Elijah.
- A. God graciously provided for His prophet. He sent His angel, His messenger to provide direction. And He provided bread and water to sustain and strengthen His servant for his long journey to the mountain of meeting.
- B. God invites Elijah to open his heart to God – to express his feelings. “What are you doing here Elijah?” (verses 9 & 13).  
**Philippians 4:6-7 NAU** - "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 519.

<sup>4</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 266.

**1 Peter 5:6-7 NAU** - "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

13. Rather than seeing Elijah as a man fallen from his confidence in God, we should see him as a man stirred in his passion for God's honor.

I. Was Elijah's statement of being the last of the faithful accurate?

**1 Kings 19:10 NAU** - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

A. Were there none left in service to God?

1. What about Obadiah and what about the prophets he hid in the cave?

**1 Kings 18:3-4 NAU** - "Ahab called Obadiah who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly; <sup>4</sup> for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water.)"

2. Had all the sons of Israel forsaken God's covenant?

What about the change after the prophets of Baal were defeated? Were none of these truly changed?

**1 Kings 18:39 NAU** - "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."

B. Elijah has come forth as God's prophet announcing the condition of Israel

1. Twice God says, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

2. Elijah has come to meet God at Mount Horeb. He came not to boast of his own faithfulness, nor to cry of his fear of Jezebel. He came to speak the truth regarding his people.

a. You can hear the passion in Elijah's voice, the anguish and grief.

**1 Kings 19:10 NAU** - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

b. He has come to bemoan the spiritual darkness in Israel. He was deeply stirred at the unfaithfulness and idolatry of his people.

c. The Apostle Paul expressed such feeling.

**Romans 9:1-3 NAU** - "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,"

3. It wasn't fear for his own life before Jezebel that he was bemoaning. Rather, Jezebel's complete disregard for the display of God on Mount Carmel led Elijah to conclude the condition in Israel had not changed.

Dale Ralph Davis: “Elijah was not terrified by Jezebel but broken by her unrepentant paganism and by her continuing power throughout the nation.”<sup>5</sup>

4. From Elijah’s perspective, Jezebel would continue to keep Baal worship alive in Israel. Although they repented after the failure of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Jezebel would make certain it would be a brief repentance. John Woodhouse: “*Enough of a rebellious regime that cannot be changed, even by fire from Heaven! I had hoped ... But look at Jezebel. Nothing has changed.*” “Now, O LORD, take away my life (*nephesh*).” *I would rather you take my life than that woman!* “For I am no better than my fathers.” *I have done no better than the prophets before me in bringing the necessary change to Israel.*”<sup>6</sup>

## II. What is our reaction to the sin that surrounds us?

- A. Our nation is thoroughly secularized
  1. Our ethical and moral evils are boundless. Lawlessness abounds. Hatred knows no limits. People lash out at the least provocation.
  2. Our leaders often seem clueless regarding simple morality. These things should stir our hearts.
  2. More important, we should grieve at the great resistance to the Gospel. People have no regard for God. No concern for His honor. No desire for His worship.
- B. What about the condition of the modern church?
  1. We are swallowed up by pragmatism, willing to try anything as long as it adds people to our number. People are more interested in the activities of the church than the teaching of the church.
  2. Do we care about the doctrinal weakness? Does it bring us grief?
  3. Many are swallowed up by the beliefs and standards of our culture. We fear to be a voice of reason, of clarity. We fear the speak against the status quo.
- C. It is hard to speak the truth when it is not received
  1. Jezebel had one reaction to the truth – get rid of the messenger.
  2. The church seems to embrace every modern trend, every social dogma. Few are willing to be a voice of reason.

## Conclusion:

1. I’m not sure we can truthfully cry out the words of Elijah, “Lord, I’m the only one left concerned for your honor.” We too are often guilty of disregarding the glory of God. Our prayer must be, “Oh God, tune my heart to worship You supremely. Protect me from the lies of this world.”
2. Living life in this world demands great discernment. Romans 12 gives us great direction: **Romans 12:2 NAU** - “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

<sup>5</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 266.

<sup>6</sup> John Woodhouse, *1 Kings—Power, Politics, and the Hope of the World*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 539–540.