

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 13

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

CHAPTER 19

INTRODUCTION

Elijah had just experienced the mountain-top spiritual triumph over the principalities of darkness at Mount Carmel. The LORD God of Israel demonstrated that He is the one true and living God and there is none else beside Him. Elijah was so consumed with zeal for God that he ordered the killing of 450 prophets of Baal at the foot of the mountain. In this chapter, some of us might be surprised to see Elijah despondent and dejected. We can understand from the inspired writer James in the New Testament who wrote that Elijah was “a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17).

The chapter is interestingly instructive for our spiritual growth. It is also important that we learn some valuable truths about the LORD our God and the character and conduct of man. This chapter has also aroused the interests of Bible scholars who see Elijah’s response to Jezebel’s threat differently. Some condemn Elijah for being a coward and wallowing in self-

pity. Others commend him for desiring to be alone with God and willing to recommit himself to the LORD. In view of these differing understanding of the prophet’s behaviour, we shall try to have a correct biblical understanding of this man of God and learn the precious lesson that the Word conveys.

OUTLINE

1. Elijah was despondent (vv. 1-3);
2. Elijah was sustained by the Angel of the LORD for his journey to Mount Horeb (vv. 4-8);
3. Elijah was interviewed by the LORD God (vv. 9-14);
4. Elijah was re-commissioned by God (vv.15-18);
5. Elijah called Elisha (vv. 19-21).

COMMENTARY

Elijah’s Despondence – 19:1-3

King Ahab returned to Jezreel after witnessing the spiritual battle on Mount Carmel. The fact that he just related the incident to his wife Jezebel and emphasised that Elijah had slain all the prophets showed that he was a very weak king. He should have repented of his sins of idolatry and returned to the LORD God. This means that he had to get rid of Jezebel and the golden calves idols in Dan and Bethel. Ahab did not have the moral courage and conviction to do these things. He should command Jezebel to renounce her gods and worship the LORD God of Israel. He did not do

this. He displayed his own self-centredness and insecurity. He was afraid and lost in his sins.

On hearing from Ahab, Queen Jezebel immediately sent a messenger to Elijah with a message of death. Elijah was still in Jezreel. She swore by her gods that she would kill Elijah by the next day as he had killed all the prophets. When Elijah “saw” that, he “went for his life” and came to Beersheba, the southernmost city of Judah, which was about 100 miles (approx. 150 km as the crow flies) from Jezreel. Beersheba (meaning: “well of seven”) had a special place in the hearts of the Israelites. It had a rich history with their patriarchs. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree there in commemoration of the covenant he made with Abimelech of the Philistines (Genesis 21:32-33). Abraham returned to Beersheba after his intended offering of Isaac on Moriah (Genesis 22:19). Isaac returned to Beersheba after his sojourn in Gerar (Genesis 26:17, 23). Jacob fled from Beersheba to escape the wrath of Esau (Genesis 27:42; 28:10). On his way to Egypt, Jacob offered sacrifices at Beersheba (Genesis 46:1). The Prophet Samuel’s sons, Joel and Abiah, were judges in Beersheba.

It was a long and tedious journey to Beersheba for Elijah. He did not have an opportunity to rest and recuperate from the arduous spiritual battle at Carmel. His body and spirit were stretched to their limit. He must have been very tired and exhausted. And now having received Jezebel’s death-sentence, he immediately

departed from Jezreel to Beersheba. The divine writer recorded “what he saw.” What did Elijah see? Why did he leave Jezreel? Many understand this “seeing” as Jezebel’s determination to kill him because he “went for his life” (v.3). In other words, he was afraid of Jezebel and of being killed by her. Can this be true? Elijah had just won a great victory at Carmel. He was brave and courageous but now he appeared to be a coward and in fear for his life. Modern psychologists and physicians might agree that this was possible because he was totally drained by the emotional strain.

Others view the “seeing” as a reference to his disappointment at the unexpected effect of the battle at Carmel. He had expected the people of Israel including Ahab to repent and renounce the gods of Baal. Instead it had a reverse effect. Elijah might have wondered why the demonstration of such a mighty miracle had little or no impact on the people of God. So he fled because he feared for his life as well as not wanting to give Jezebel the honour of executing him. This might give the impression that she was the ultimate victor. Hence, Elijah begged the LORD to take his life (v.4).

Perhaps the real reason is a combination of both. The fact that remains was that he went to Beersheba to be far away from the wicked Jezebel, thus depriving her of the opportunity to kill him.

At Beersheba, Elijah left his servant in the city. He continued another day’s journey of about 15 miles by himself into the wilderness.

He found a “juniper tree” which was actually a shrub, which can grow up to 4 metres high. Desert travellers used this bush for shade. Elijah sat under the shrub and there he begged the LORD to take his life. He considered that his completed mission was a failure and it was no better than “my fathers” (v.4b). By “my fathers” Elijah probably meant those who served God before him and who also had gone through the same experience of failure as he. Elijah had expected Ahab and Jezebel and the people to confess their sins and repent in ashes and sackcloth after witnessing the spectacular evidence at Carmel. But it did not happen. Thus this deep sense of apparent failure combined with his feeling of emotional and spiritual burnout, and his bodily weariness and hunger, drove him to decide that it was better to die in the hands of the LORD.

Elijah Sustained by the Angel of the LORD – 19:4-8

In times when the mind, body, and spirit are burnt out, the best cure is sleep. And that was exactly what Elijah did. He lay down under the shrub bush and he slept. We do not know how long it was before an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise, and eat” (v.5). The Hebrew word for “angel” is “*malak*” [from which we get Malachi] which means “messenger”. In verse 7, this angel was identified as the Angel of the LORD. This Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is attributed to the pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Tri-Unity

Godhead, the Son of God! ¹ The Angel “touched” Elijah and woke him up. When Elijah opened his eyes, behold, right before his eyes were bread and a jug of water. God saw and knew his servant’s needs. He let him rest and sleep. Then later His Angel woke him up and there was bread and water to nourish his body. Elijah sat down, ate and drank. Then he went to sleep again. Indeed, he must be very tired. Then, the Angel of the LORD touched him a second time. He told Elijah to arise and eat another meal for the journey he was about to take was going to be a long one. The destination was Horeb, the mountain of God. If it was the traditional site in Sinai the journey would be about 200 miles. But if the site was the recent discovery by archaeologists, then Horeb would be somewhere in south east of Arabia. This journey would take about 160 miles. Whether the destination to Horeb was Elijah’s original intention, or that the Angel of the LORD directed him to the place, is not very clear. But if we take into consideration the context, it is most probably the latter. Mount Horeb was a very significant place. It was called the mountain of God. There God met Moses face to face and gave the Law to the people that they might live and walk in the ways of the LORD and be blessed. But if they disobeyed the LORD, they would be cursed. There, the children of Israel made a golden calf and worshipped it. When God wanted to wipe out Israel for their idolatry, Moses

¹ Other passages featuring the pre-incarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ are: Genesis 16:7-11; Exodus 3:1-4; Judges 2:1-4.

interceded for the people (Exodus: 32-33).

Elijah got up and trekked about 200 miles to the mountain of God. He took forty days and forty nights. He could have done it in half the time. But considering what he had gone through prior to this, it was quite natural for him to take a longer time – especially after the demanding work on Mount Carmel, slaughtering of the prophets at the Kishon River, and outrunning Ahab and his chariot to Jezreel, and trekking 100 miles from Jezreel to Beersheba! At Horeb, he found a cave and lodged there. The Word of the LORD came to him. God asked him a question (v.9): “What doest thou here, Elijah?” Of course, God, who knows the hearts and minds of men, knew the heart of Elijah. Some scholars interpreted God’s question here as a rebuke against Elijah. Others understand the question as an invitation for Elijah to unload the burden that was in his heart and mind. The latter is probably right. Elijah responded and said (v.9): *I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*

Elijah claimed that his zeal for God had overtaken him. He was upset for God’s sake and cause. He charged the children of Israel for breaking the LORD’S covenant (18:18); for destroying the altars (18:30); and for killing the LORD’S prophets (18:13). Elijah continued that he was the only prophet of the LORD left, and the

enemies even sought his life. Was Elijah complaining? Was he indulging in self-pity? Or was he indicting the children of Israel for their spiritual apostasy? This writer would agree with the view that he was not complaining but rather he was accusing Israel for breaking the LORD’S covenant. Elijah was actually telling the LORD that he has finished his mission to Ahab and Israel. He did not wish to live on and had asked God to take his life.

Elijah Interviewed by -19:9-14

God did not let him go so easily. He had plans for him. The time for him to leave the world was not due yet. God then sent “a great and strong wind” that it shook the mountain and broke the rocks into pieces. After the wind, there was an earthquake. The earthquake was followed by fire, and after the fire, there was “a still small voice” (vv. 11, 12). In the stupendous phenomena of the wind, earthquake and fire, which happened in succession, the LORD was not in them. But it was after a silence that the LORD spoke.

The message Elijah understood by these natural outbursts was that God does not always speak in such stupendous manifestations as wind, earthquake and fire. But God would choose the “still (silent) small voice” – His Word to speak to the people. Sinners are not converted by the external and miracles are externals. It is the inner working of the Spirit of God that convicts and transforms lives. In other words, Elijah needed to remember the power of God’s Word. What God had done in history and His

given Word were sufficient for us to seek to know Him and His will. Elijah needed to learn that the conviction of the heart is the domain of God. It is not by the miracles that hearts are converted but by the work of God's Spirit.

When Elijah began to step out of the cave, at the entrance, he had to cover his face sensing the presence of God Almighty. He then heard a voice asking the same question (v.13): "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah gave the same answer and expressed the same feeling. It appears that Elijah had not accepted the explanation and still wanted to go "home". Hence the next section is to appoint Elijah's replacement, Elisha.

Elijah Re-commissioned– 19:15-18

The LORD had one final task for him. It was made up of three parts. The LORD sent him on another mission. There were three things to do. The first one was to go to Damascus to anoint Hazael king of Syria. The second one was to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king of over Israel. And the third one was to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat who lived in Abel-meholah ("meadow of dancing"), as his successor. The LORD then lifted up his despondency by revealing to him that he was not the only prophet who was alive and kicking. The LORD had preserved and protected 7,000 of His faithful prophets! These prophets were loyal and honest to Him for they had not bowed to Baal nor kissed its statues.

God explained to him that He had other people to carry out His plan

and purpose. The purpose of making Hazael king was to carry out God's judgement upon Israel for its idolatry and rejection of the LORD. Jehu on the other hand was to put an end to Omri's dynasty and to initiate religious reforms that would bring Israel back to the LORD. Finally, Elijah should not think or feel that he was the only one who had carried out the work of the LORD. God in re-commissioning him showed that Hazael, Jehu and Elisha all of whom he was directed to anoint would fulfil His plan and purpose.

Elijah called Elisha – 19:19-21

So Elijah obediently departed from the mountain of Horeb. He sought Elisha, the son of Shaphat. Elisha ("God is salvation") was ploughing the farm with twelve yoke of oxen and he was the twelfth. This shows that Elisha's father was a very wealthy man. Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle on him. The casting of the prophet's mantle on an Israelite by the prophet himself was the customary way of drafting the man for the prophetic ministry to which God had called him. Elisha clearly knew what Elijah meant. This explains his action in running to Elijah. He told Elijah to let him kiss his father and mother, and then he would follow him. And Elijah replied (v.20b): "*Go back again: for what have I done to thee?*" There is a need to correctly interpret Elijah's reply. Was Elijah rebuking Elisha? Did he mean that Elisha was not worthy of God's calling? Those who agree to this interpretation use the analogy of Luke 9:61-62 in which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the man who wanted to

follow Him but wanted first to bid his family good-bye. And the Lord Jesus Christ replied that *“no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”* The man’s good-byes to his family were an obstacle or lame excuse not to follow Jesus.

There is no comparison between the two incidents. Elisha was right in telling his parents first before he left according to the Fifth Commandment. Elisha wished to return to his home, and to kiss his father and mother. This was the custom of bidding good-bye. Elisha’s next action showed that he understood the cost of his prophetic calling. He then killed his oxen, and used the wooden ploughing yoke to cook the meat for a feast in which he invited the people to celebrate with him. This was his way of saying “no turning back.” He returned home to sever all connections, so as not to delay his commitment. In that instance, he had counted the cost – renounce affections, security and all the things which he was familiar and comfortable with. He then arose and followed Elijah. He began his prophetic ministry by serving Elijah first.

PRACTICAL VALUE

A deep sense of failure can be devastating. Failure leads to fear and fear leads to negative thoughts. Elijah’s experience is a valuable lesson for us. He felt that he had failed in his mission. He was afraid that he might be killed by Jezebel. He ran very far away and begged God to take his

life. We must guard against such feelings. One of the best things to do in such situations is to sleep and rest. In addition, it is important to know and trust God.

God has revealed to us in His dealings with Elijah that He knows and understands our trials and troubles. Just as He had called Elijah to the prophetic ministry, He provided all his needs. When Elijah was down, He gently and tenderly restored him. He provided him with sustenance to make the long and hard journey to Horeb. And when Elijah felt that he was a failure, the LORD re-commissioned him, thus restoring his confidence and his usefulness to Him. Are you despondent and discouraged? Look to God, read His Word and let His Spirit lead and guide you. What we need to do is to obey His Word.

The phrase “a still small voice” is often used to encourage one to feel the leading of God. This can be misleading and disastrous. The context of the phrase used here is to point to God’s work---what He had done, and God’s Word--- given to man. In other words, it is the knowledge of God and His will through His given Word that we should listen to ---to hear His voice. We are not to imagine and look for a little voice saying in our ears. Whatever we want to do, it is better to check it first with the Scriptures. If it falls within the will of God, go ahead and do it. If it does not agree with the Word of God, then refrain from doing it.

God called Elisha to the prophetic ministry through Elijah.

Elisha exemplified one who counted the cost of following God’s call and was totally committed to His cause. We can compare Elisha’s calling to our calling to be a Christian, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of us seldom count the cost of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must take our profession of faith in Christ very seriously. Remember the warning of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:24): *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* If we want to be truly born-again disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must first deny ourselves. We must accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives. This entails daily submission to Him. It requires our daily reading and searching of His Word in order to know Him, and to discover His will, and to do it. In today’s society, there is a need to be a good witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. As wheat, we must distinguish ourselves from the tares. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: 1 Kings 19:1-3; John 3:18-21.

TUESDAY: 1 Kings 19:4-8; Exodus 24:3-8; Isaiah 40:31.

WEDNESDAY: 1 Kings 19:9-13; Psalm 56:9-13.

THURSDAY: 1 Kings 19:14-18; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

FRIDAY: 1 Kings 19:19-21; Mark 1:14-20.

Discussion Questions

1. Having seen what Elijah did earlier (chapter 18), do you think he feared for his life when he learned that Jezebel was determined to kill him?

2. What does Elijah mean by saying that he was no better than his “fathers”? Compare verse 4 with verses 10 and 14.

3. How did the Angel of the LORD treat Elijah? What does it tell us about Him?

4. Is it a sin to feel tired of a ministry and to ask the LORD to take you home?

5. What did God do in vv.11-12? What impact did it have on Elijah when he heard "a still small voice" (v.13)? What do you think Elijah had learned from these things?

6. What specific commands did God give to Elijah in vv.15-16?

7. What words of prophecy did God add in vv:17?

8. What concluding information did Elijah receive from God in vv:18?

9. When God's call came to Elisha, how did he respond? Was it hard for him to make the decision?

10. In this chapter, what have you learned about following God's guidance from the examples of Elijah and Elisha?
