

# 1 Kings 19:1-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn back to 1 Kings. 1 Kings chapter 19, it's on page 301 if you've got a church Bible to hand. We're back in 1 Kings again tonight, following on from last week, where we saw Elijah humbled himself in prayer.

And God answered his prayer and rain came. And we come tonight to a deeply beloved section of the Bible, don't we? 1 Kings chapter 19, it's a kind of devotional favourite passage. It is often used as a sort of spiritual therapy kind of passage. Many good commentators have used 1 Kings 19 in that way.

It's the passage with the stillness of God's small voice that is so, so calming, isn't it? It's the passage on the comforting work of God's angels for Elijah and for his servants who are depressed. The passage on how even the strongest of God's servants lapse in faith and have a wobble and need encouragement. It feels like a great passage for a spiritual therapy for the spiritually depressed.

[ 1 : 29 ] And it is true, isn't it, that the Lord does encourage us when we are down, that he does help us, that he is a God who has compassion on us when we struggle in our faith.

But I'm afraid tonight that we're going to have to dismantle a little bit our views on what we think 1 Kings 19 is all about.

It's going to mean having a bit of a shift on what we think Elijah is doing in this passage. By the end, I might not convince all of you of what I think I'm about to tell you is happening in the passage. But I hope that we will see clearly that the text here is not just giving us a therapeutic message for when we feel spiritually down.

Rather, rather that the text is a loving rebuke for those of us who are spiritually indifferent. It's for people like me, actually, and for you.

[ 2 : 37 ] Tonight, it's going to mean a bit of detective work in the passage. The plan is to look at Elijah in this section under two headings, really. And the first heading is that Elijah here is the misunderstood Elijah.

He is the misunderstood Elijah. I think, and I certainly thought, that I knew what Elijah was about in this passage before I looked at it more closely this week.

That Elijah is having some sort of spiritual crisis of faith. He's having a wobble of confidence in God. Let me give you a bit of context if you weren't here last week and the week a couple of weeks ago. At the end of chapter 18, we ended on a bit of a high, didn't we? The refreshing rain has come in response to Elijah's humble prayer. And the prophets of Baal are defeated earlier in chapter 18 as well.

And then Ahab, he's seen all of that and he is sent by Elijah to Jezreel back to the palace. And you can imagine him rocking up at the palace.

[ 3 : 49 ] And I think he's still reeling from what was a kind of corporate conversion experience on Mount Carmel. He's come home from the Elijah conference, hasn't he?

And he's seen a great demonstration of God's power. And he's been given the go-ahead to resume rule under God. I think that's what happens at the end of chapter 18.

He's eaten a sort of meal of restoration. And so at the start of chapter 19, he bursts into the palace, doesn't he?

And he says to his wife Jezebel, Well, darling, you will not believe what has just happened. Did you know that the Lord is God? And Elijah, his prophet, has killed all of Baal's prophets, the false gods. But Jezebel, his wife, is not so pleased, does she? She is furious. Ahab was the dark king. But it turns out that Jezebel, his wife, is the blackest of black.

[ 5 : 01 ] And she marks Elijah for death. Cross my heart and hope to die, verse 2. By this time tomorrow, Elijah needs to be dead.

And so Elijah flees from Jezebel, doesn't he? But I think this is misunderstanding number one. We assume Elijah flees because he is scared of Jezebel.

And you can come back to me and say, well, that is what the text says, isn't it? And look at verse 3. He was afraid. So he ran for his life and came to be a Sheba.

But I just want to say something on that word, afraid. And I think maybe you can hear what's coming. It's the old chestnut, isn't it, of Bible translation issues. And I'm afraid there is a bit of a Bible translation issue here.

In some very, very rare cases in the English translation of the original Hebrew, occasionally there's a word in Hebrew that can mean more than one thing.

[ 6 : 07 ] It can mean two or more things. And so what the translators do is they look at the context of that word and they make a decision. And 99.9999% of cases, that is a really straightforward thing to do.

And so we can be confident in our English translations. But very occasionally, the context around that word can also be misunderstood in a way that that word is translated unhelpfully.

And in this case, the English translators are so sure they've got it right, they don't even put a footnote to the alternative word for the word afraid in verse 3.

There is another way that you can understand the word there. And it is simply to see something. To see.

So alternatively, Elijah saw something in Jezebel and he ran for his life. I want to kind of give more strength to this argument.

[ 7 : 23 ] That he didn't run simply because he was afraid of his life. Because actually, we see a few verses later, don't we, that he asks God whether he could die.

Death for Elijah is not the issue here. He flees because he sees something in Jezebel that deeply disturbs him.

Maybe he is afraid of something in Jezebel, but it's not that she is going to murder him. He's seen that even evil Ahab had been moved in chapter 18.

And I think we see him eating a meal of restoration, at least outwardly, towards God at the end of chapter 18. But Jezebel, she is different, isn't she? She is like a kind of spiritual black wall, a brick wall of blackness.

A brick wall to the evidence that God has shown of his power. She turns out to be the evil core force behind Ahab's rule.

[ 8 : 27 ] He's not denying that he's worried about dying, but dying from her hand that is the issue here.

If he lets her kill him, then in a sense she's had the moral victory here. And evil at its most pure and at its core source would be seen to get a victory over God's word and his gospel.

And through that chapter we see that Elijah is not fleeing in panic, but there is a plan. This is not a sudden wobble.

This is not a sudden bout of spiritual depression. But actually we see that this is spiritual zeal from Elijah. Jezebel must not have the victory.

It's not death he's worried about. Now, just look with me at more of the details. We're told that he travels to Beersheba in verse 3. And normally at that point we assume, don't we, well here he is.

[ 9 : 30 ] He's so cowardly in this moment of crisis. He keeps running from her. But that leads to misunderstanding number 2. On his journey to Horeb.

Why he's going there. Now, Jezebel is in the north. And Elijah travels to Beersheba in the south.

That's in the land of Judah. And so when he gets to Beersheba, as far as the threat from Jezebel is concerned, he should be fine now.

If Elijah had simply felt a cowardly wobble, he can stop in Beersheba and relax. He is miles away from her at this point.

She's in Land's End and he's in John O'Croats. But we're told that when he gets to Beersheba, he keeps going. He keeps travelling, verse 4, another day's journey into the wilderness.

And it's there that he has a moment, isn't it, when he asks God that he would die. And again, we assume it's some sort of existential spiritual emergency.

[ 10 : 39 ] That before he was living by faith on Mount Carmel, but now Jezebel's on the scene. He's living by sight and he's kind of lost the plot. One commentator says at this point, Elijah has finally cracked up.

As we read on, we see the man at whose courage all Israel had once marvelled, now fleeing before the threat of this woman. But I think that's a misunderstanding.

You see, as we go through the text, we realise that Elijah has got something else on his mind here. Not just self-preservation. This is not just blind panic from an evil queen.

There is a plan here. Because where is Elijah heading? Where is he trying to get to? Angels visit him and give him food for a journey.

Not just away from Jezebel. He's already got far enough from her. But on another 40 day and night journey to a place called Horeb.

[ 11 : 48 ] In verse 8. Horeb was in modern day Syria. It's about another 200 miles south of Beersheba. And he wants to go to this place.

To Horeb. But again, our assumptions crowd in, don't they? When he arrives at his destination, the Lord asks him on two occasions, What are you doing here, Elijah?

And we think he's doing a bit of a Jonah. That he's kind of gone away from what he should be doing, from the place that he should be. And he's run away from trouble.

And God is telling him off for that, for coming to this place. We assume that his encounter with God is about him needing to have a bit of a quiet time.

Because he's run away from the situation where God gently comforts him in this kind of still voice that we get. That he is a sort of backsliding prophet.

[ 12 : 48 ] We assume that this whole thing is Elijah cracking up. And he's gone off track. And God has to rebuke him for that. What are you doing here, Elijah? And yet he does it gently and reassuringly in a nice whisper.

We assume that Elijah is being self-obsessed when he complains twice to God. Lord, I am the only one who worships you.

And we think, you're so full of yourself, Elijah. But I think, again, that is the misunderstood Elijah. Let's see why. Notice how the angel of the Lord visits him in verse 7.

And he says, Arise, eat for the journey is too great for you. And then he heads off on foot for the 40-day journey to Horeb.

You see, this isn't Elijah going rogue. But God, through his angel, is leading him to this place. And God, in his angel, is endorsing this journey and feeding him up for it.

[ 13 : 53 ] And strengthening him up for it. Not in fear of Jezebel. But to come before God in Horeb. Now look at verse 8 again.

The narrator adds the important description of the place that he's heading. The mount of God. The mount of God in Horeb.

In Syria. Yes, it is Mount Sinai. The mountain of earthquakes. And of hurricane force winds.

Of God's covenant mediator. Hiding in a cave. While God passes by him. And it's all here, isn't it?

In 1 Kings 19. Elijah is in a cave. With a great wind. And with earthquakes. This is like Moses on Mount Sinai 2.0.

[ 14 : 52 ] The Elijah encounter. It's déjà vu of Exodus 32 and 33. This is covenant mountain. That Elijah has come to.

It is the place where Moses was for 40 days and 40 nights. Where he meets with God. And so Elijah is not just some whining prophet here.

He comes to the place of covenant making. It's like a courtroom. It's like a courtroom, isn't it? And Elijah goes to the courtroom. He takes a journey. And he arrives at the kind of judges chambers.

The legislators chambers. Where laws have been made and bound. And written in stone. And the supreme divine legislator.

The Lord is at the door. And he says to Elijah. What are you doing here? But again our assumptions plague the passage. Because it's not a rebuke.

[ 15 : 54 ] Like as if he's Jonah. It is an invitation. It's an invitation for Elijah to bring his prosecution to the legislator.

To the judge on covenant mountain. It's as if God is saying to us all through this passage. Look I myself had Elijah come to this place through my angel who fed him.

And brought him to my door. And so Elijah. What are you doing here? What's on your mind Elijah? Why are you here?

What do you want me to do as the legislator? Let's hear your concerns. And Elijah answers doesn't he in verse 10.

He says I've been very jealous for the Lord. The God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant. They've thrown down your altars. And they've killed your prophets with the sword.

[16:56] And I even I only am left. And they seek my life to take it away. And he repeats the same thing later in verse 14. You see would it be so hard to believe that Elijah is actually telling the truth to God here.

That this isn't self pity. This isn't a zeal just for his own life. Or a kind of despondency. Or a disappointment in the success of his own ministry.

But he is led to this place by a burden and a jealousy for God himself. For his name and his people's behaviour in light of that name.

And the awful truth that they are trying to kill one of his prophets. He isn't here for some spiritual therapy. But to call upon God's sense of justice.

And to do something. And to uphold his own holy name. Now of course he knows what has happened in the past to the prophets of Baal. He knows about their little victories doesn't he?

[18:03] The great victories. But what he has seen now in Jezebel. Is the heart of the darkness of this war. That is going on in the land.

He's seen in her more than the excitement. And the initial phase of Carmel. Doesn't he? He sees that evil Queen Jezebel. Represents a stubbornness that gets harder and harder.

No matter how much evidence that the Lord gives. Of his power and of his existence. And zeal consumes him. And it drags him on a supernaturally endorsed journey.

To the prosecutor's bench. And as he comes to Covenant Mountain. To say to God. Lord this is the situation. What are you going to do about it?

For your name's sake. Lord put an end to this evil. And so that is why. Verse 15 to 18.

[19:06] If you look there. Are not just bolted on. With no connection. Elijah is told to leave the mountain. Isn't he? In verse 15.

And head back. And he'll be given a king to anoint. And a successor to follow him. Elisha. Now. Now.

The best we kind of assume. When we think we know what is going on here. Is that God. He's sympathetic to Elijah. Isn't he? And he wants to encourage Elijah.

And send him back to where he should be going. And to give him some helpers. Look. I'm going to give you Elisha. And I'm going to give you this king. Hazael. You need help Elijah.

You need a plurality of elders. You need gospel partners. So here you go. Have Elisha. And Hazael. To help you out. And of course. They do help him out.

[20:03] Don't they? But what we miss. In this passage. At the end. In those last few verses. Is that these men. Are given to Elijah. As the direct answer.

Of his prosecution. On Mount Sinai. Sinai. These men. Are the sentence. That the legislator. Is now going to pass.

In response. Notice that Elisha. And Hazael. Are the men. Who will bear the sword. Aren't they? Those who escape.

From Hazael. Will find Elisha. Waiting for them. With a sword. In his hand. He says. Okay Elijah. I've heard your complaints.

And I'm going to respond. And I'm going to end this. And so I will set apart. As my instruments. These men. Elisha. And Hazael.

[20:58] But. There are 7,000. Who've not bowed to Baal. Who I'll rescue. You see. Elijah. I will respond. In the way that I always respond. To this kind of thing.

In judgment. And I'll remember mercy. At the same time. So do you see. He's the misunderstood Elijah here. I think. He's not here for his own comfort.

And his own preservation. But for the honour of God's name. So the question is. What do we do with this sort of Elijah? And I think it's true that.

Maybe the translation issues. Have not helped us. It's not our fault. But I think. What this whole situation. Teaches us.

Is that actually. We also have a preference. For a certain kind of prophet. And a certain kind of Elijah. And so that's my second heading tonight.

[ 21 : 54 ] The preferred Elijah. The misunderstood Elijah. And secondly. The preferred Elijah. Now I admit tonight. I'm not so much applying. Lessons from the text.

But I'm applying a point. That I think we need to. To have first. From the attitude. That we have towards this text. And from who Elijah is.

Because. We want an Elijah. That we can kind of cuddle up to. On the sofa. Don't we? A therapeutic Elijah.

We love to imagine him here. As the wobbling Christian. Who needs some comfort. And we quickly identify. With him. As that kind of Elijah.

But when we understand. The text properly. We realise. That actually Elijah. Is a man that we struggle. To identify with at all. And that is very. Very worrying.

[ 22 : 57 ] Isn't it? If Elijah is simply whining. And wobbling here. Over Jezebel. Then he's kind of okay. Because he's like us. Isn't he?

And we get comfort from that. But if he isn't just whining. Then he condemns us. His experience. And his attitude. Are hugely challenging to us. They are disturbing to us. And he makes us ask questions. That we don't want to ask of ourselves. Could I.

Or do I ever say things. Or feel things. Like Elijah. Says and feels them. Do I get so bothered about God. Do I get so bothered about his name.

Would I have gone. On a journey like this. To bring my case before God. For his name. You see. If he's just selfish. And wavering in faith.

[ 23 : 55 ] Then we don't have to ask those things at all. Do we? We can just cuddle up to him. And say there. There Elijah. Isn't it good Elijah. That we have the same God. Who comforts us when we're low.

And we can kind of stick one Kings 19. On our fridge. The one who comes to us. In a still voice. And who gives us gospel partners. To work with.

Or something like that. It is true. It is true isn't it. Elijah does seem depressed. In this passage. And he wants to die. But the big question. We've got to ask.

Is why he wants that. And the reason is. What he says to the Lord. On Covenant Mountain. He is depressed. Over the altars. And over the prophets of the Lord.

That have been killed. And knocked down. And of the. Of the behaviour. Of God's people. And I think we've seen.

[ 24 : 51 ] That he would rather die. Than allow Jezebel. The moral victory. He'd rather die. Than contemplate. The absolute stubbornness. Of some people around him. That even when God.

Shows himself. In such spectacular ways. Some people just won't budge. And that just cuts to his heart. When God is offended.

And when people refuse. To turn to him. You know. More often than not. I simply shrug my shoulders. At that kind of thing. And Elijah here.

Exposes how frivolous. That response is. How unspiritual. That is of me. Continued hardness. Of heart.

In others. Breaks his heart. Another commentator says. What a contrast. Elijah the hero. On Carmel. Victorious over Baalism.

[ 25 : 49 ] Elijah the coward. Of unbelief. At Horeb. Self-occupied. And wishing to die. But I think we misunderstand him. That way. On purpose.

Because if he is like that. Kind of cowardly Elijah. If he is merely. A faithless whiner. He's less threatening. To us. And we can excuse. Our indifference.

To God's holy name. But if he really is. This consumed. By God's name. And his reputation. Then we feel shamed. By that.

Don't we? And we don't want. That sort of Elijah. Around in our lives. Thank you very much. And I just wonder. Whether it's the same. With the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. We want. A therapeutic. Jesus. Don't we? We want. A therapeutic. Prophet. And priest. And king. We want.

[ 26 : 44 ] A kind of Jesus. That is perfect. To just have on the sofa. With us. A gentle Jesus. A Jesus. Who is able. To sympathize. With our weaknesses. Just as long.

As he doesn't expose them. We want. To minimize. Jesus. In his holiness. And purity. But if he were small enough. To be like us.

In every way. Then he wouldn't be big enough. To worship. Would he? CFD Moore. A theologian. Points out. That Jesus. Is both. Continuous.

And. Discontinuous. From the rest of mankind. He is like us. In that he is a human being. He is fully human. And yet.

He is not like us. In that he is. He is sinless. And perfectly holy. He is pure. There are many. Who want to say. And who did say.

[ 27 : 38 ] That Jesus Christ. Had a fallen human nature. That he sinned. In various ways. That he had an affair. With Mary. Or he was prone. To fits of anger.

The Pharisees. Questioned the morality. Of his birth. Didn't they? And of his parentage. Others accused him. Of working for the devil. In the things. That he did for God. And they did that. Because if you can discount. The holiness. Of the Lord Jesus. And ramp up. Some imaginary. Moral weaknesses. You can turn him. Into a safe Jesus. Into a.

Sofa kind of Jesus. Into a Jesus. Who offers. No real. Challenge. To our lifestyles. And who doesn't. Bite us. But if we read.

The New Testament. That is not. The Lord Jesus Christ. Of the scriptures. Is it? It. And. I saw this. Really helpful passage. From GK Chesterton. Who makes the point.

[ 28 : 36 ] He talks about. The characteristics. Of the Lord Jesus. That make him. Almost intimidating. To sinful people. Like us. His holiness. And otherness.

Challenges us. And we don't like it. Do we? He says. That Jesus Christ. Of the New Testament. Is full. Of sudden gestures. Evidently. Significant.

Except that we hardly know. What they signify. Of enigmatic silences. Of ironic replies. We see the outbreaks. Of wrath.

Like storms. Above our atmosphere. Do not seem to break out. They don't seem to break out. Exactly where we should have expected them. But they seem to follow.

Some higher weather chart. Of their own. He talks about. Peter. And his relationship. With the Lord Jesus. He says. The Peter. Whom the popular church.

[ 29 : 29 ] Teaches. Is rightly. The Peter. To whom Christ. Said in forgiveness. Feed my lands. Conveniently. Though. He is not. The Peter.

Upon whom. Christ. Turned. As if he were. The devil. Crying. In that. Obscure wrath. Get behind me. Satan. See.

Chesterton. Puts his finger. On something there. I think. That people. Naturally. Love a Jesus. Who gives people. What they want. Not a Jesus.

Who changes. What we want. And who challenges us. And Elijah. And our relationship. With this passage. Maybe in the past. Brings a challenge.

To us. Doesn't it? Of seeing. The difference. Between what. Often we want. And what the Bible. Says. We really need. I wonder.

[ 30 : 23 ] As kind of. Modern people. We want. To feel loved. For who we are. To be pitied. For what we've gone through. To feel. Intimately understood.

And to be accepted. Unconditionally. We want. To gain. Self-esteem. To be. Affirmed. That we're okay. To be able. To assert.

Our own opinions. And our own desires. Is. But the challenge. Of Elijah. And of his. Christ. Is that actually. We need something else.

Isn't it? We need a God. To change me. From who I am. In my instinctive. Self-righteousness. And above all. I need a God.

Who is merciful. To me. Because I haven't. Honoured his name. Above my own. As Elijah does. And as the Lord. Jesus Christ does. Ultimately. I need a God.

[ 31 : 17 ] Who is going to. Show me up. I need him. To expose. My spiritual indifference. So that he can deal with it. And he can heal me. Maybe.

We misunderstand Elijah. Because of issues. In the text. And the way we read it. But even if I haven't. Convinced you. Of the issues. Of the text. I hope I have. Convinced you.

That underneath. The way we read. This chapter. Is the fact. That we want. To read it. In a certain way. And we want. To read the gospels.

In a certain way. Don't we. The whole of the bible. Actually. To remove. The teeth. Of Jesus's. Holy zeal. And only. To have a gentle.

Jesus. Who doesn't. Threaten us. Who doesn't. Convict us. But we have. To come to Christ. In all of his. Holiness. And feel.

[ 32 : 12 ] That jolt. Of conviction. And of shame. And we have. To do that. So we can know. The good news. Of his mercy. And of his cleansing.

That's what the Lord's Supper. Teaches us. Isn't it. As we come to his table. Tonight. The Lord's Shepherd. Supper. It shows us. How awful. Our sin really is. Of what was needed.

For it to be paid for. And cleansed. It shows us. How pure. The Lord Jesus is. And how obedient. He was. As he went to. The cross. And we are well.

And truly. Shown up by Jesus. The perfect man. But. In the same meal. We see. How wonderful. His mercy is. For us.

As we recognize that. And actually. We don't need. A saviour. That we can keep. On the sofa. Do we. To just. Give us therapy. We need.

[ 33 : 10 ] A perfect. And a holy. And a mighty. Saviour. Because after all. If he were small enough. To be like us. In every way.

He would not be big enough. To be worshipped. Would he. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.