

From: Flight to Fight
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Kings 19:9-18
But... Sermon Series
July 5, 2020

INTRO: Show **the Bible in 5 words graph**. Creation – Fall – Israel – Jesus - Church
Elijah had an enemy. *Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served BAY-uhl and worshiped him. He erected an altar for BAY-uhl in the house of BAY-uhl, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 1 Kings 16:30-34*

What's the appeal of idolatry? Baal worship is a persistent OT problem - going back to Numbers 25. Used 70x in OT, Baal = the "**rider of the clouds**," or "of **storms**." Baal brought rain & blessed the earth. When Baal arrived, it rained. Crops grew, animals fed, & people made healthy. Baal is a fertility god. Worship Baal & you might have more kids. The appeal wasn't worshipping a hand carved block of wood, it was an **ECONOMIC** act. "*Worship Baal & you'll get more stuff.*" More stuff = happy, right? Materialism is easily our god, too. Money = a spiritual power. That is why Jesus said we can't serve two gods.

King Ahab married a Baal worshipper, Jezebel, who influenced Ahab. Israel didn't totally reject the true God. They liked the old ways, & probably prayed to Him, too. Baal worship was added as an insurance policy. This was not a message God approved.

We meet **Elijah** in **17** the greatest prophet in Israel. He was courageous. His 1st act = poke Baal worshipers in the eye by declaring there would be a drought. He confronted Ahab in **1 Kings 18:20-21** *So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.* The winner of the Mt. Carmel contest between the prophets of Baal and Elijah would be whoever could call fire down from heaven & consume a sacrifice. Elijah wins. Like a duel - winner takes all. Chapter 18 ends with a great rain.

However....there's always a BUT. Ahab tells Jezebel what Elijah had done, had killed all their prophets, so she sends a text message threatening to kill him.

1 Kings 19:9-18

There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."¹¹ And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria."¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Sermon Journal:

From Flight to Fight Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, like John the Baptist, hit a rough spot. Elijah wasn't in prison like John, in fact, he had just won the Super Bowl of the Old Testament on Mount Carmel. But he crashed when Queen Jezebel threatened him. Instead of standing on the conviction he displayed in 1 Kings 18, his knees buckled, and he fell apart. He took flight and ran for his life. Depressed and isolated in the Valley of Jezreel, he wanted to die. While David Brooks' insightful book, "The Second Mountain," doesn't mention the Elijah story, it illustrates even the best among us have valleys. It's easy to be intimidated, bullied and sabotaged. It can result in us losing our nerve. Bad situations can illustrate how easy it is to forget how God has blessed and equipped us previously, even recently.

I have experienced a loss of confidence in ministry, too. Confusion and exhaustion can put us in a place where we crash. Living in an emotional and spiritual valley is not fun but we can learn from them. God's will for us is not to remain in those

valleys. God spoke to Elijah in an interesting way. It was time to get his legs and voice back and to re-enter the fight.

APPLICATION: Everyone is carrying something. We don't live forever on the mountaintop. I say repeatedly the biggest need for Christians in America is to have a "theology of suffering." YOU will have problems. You will suffer. You will have down times in the valley. It is inevitable. Sometimes we end up there because of our mistakes and sometimes because of the mistakes of others and sometimes we have no answers as to "why?" we were sent to timeout corner. How is it with your soul? Are you running away from something? Are you afraid, alone, angry, depressed or discouraged? We all pass through valleys – let's make sure we don't get stuck there. Sometimes we need a friend and sometimes we need professional help. Where are you and what are you doing there?

Comments: Commend Elijah's courage. He dealt with the face of evil and triumphed on Mt. Carmel. He stood alone. Impressive. While Ahab was a whiney loser – his wife, Jezebel was the face of evil. Elijah's collapse is stunning. How could he go from witnessing these miracles to running for his life in fear? What happened?

What can we learn from Elijah's mistakes?:

1) He lost his **NERVE**. He wasn't perfect. People disappoint us. We disappoint others. We disappoint ourselves, too. **Cut yourself/others some slack.**

Individuals fall into valleys of despair. Love the sinner, hate the sin. Be cautious in judgment.

1 Cor. 10:12 *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

Entire societies can fall, too. The USA is in a valley now: COVID-19, economics, politics, and racial tension. Be calm. Be kind.

2.) He was **ALONE**. *"I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."* It wasn't true. There were 7,000 others who weren't worshipping Baal. He knew better. His "I" problem led to a lack of clarity & vision. He was physically exhausted and was susceptible to depression. **He needed friends.** Loneliness crisis is devastating. This isolation has been worsening for years. Our screens are taking us away from flesh and blood.

I saw a report from London that ¼ of British feel they do not have any friends. 40% have gone an entire day w/o talking to anyone. Don't be alone. Be in a community of faith. We are not meant to be alone.

3) He lost **PERSPECTIVE**. Give it time. *"Now we see into a mirror dimly..."* Embrace the struggle. People seldom say, *"I was a selfish, & shallow jerk until I went on that wonderful vacation to Hawaii."* We resist change when everything is going our way. Something good often comes from our valleys. **Valley Forge.** In Sept

1777, Congress fled Philadelphia as the British captured the city. Washington failed to retake Philadelphia, so he led his 12,000-man army into winter quarters at Valley Forge, only 20 miles from Philadelphia. They remained there for 6 months, from Dec. 19, 1777 to June 19, 1778. At Valley Forge, the Continentals struggled to manage a disastrous supply crisis while retraining and reorganizing their units. About 1,700-2,000 soldiers died from disease & malnutrition. Yet, they survived this terrible winter. They also learned how to be an army. Had there been no Valley Forge, we probably would not have celebrated the 4th of July yesterday.

4) He wanted to **SEE**, rather than **HEAR**. He liked the fireworks show: earthquake, lightning, thunder, big wind. Noise & fire. Very exciting. But God is not seen; but God is heard. God speaks. We listen. God is not found by looking, but listening. Adam & Eve got into trouble when they were looking. *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*

5) **Elijah made people too big & God too small.** Maybe he thought all the people would follow him, and when they didn't respond he became hopelessly discouraged and fled for his life.

People are not God. Isaiah 55:8-11 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* God often speaks through small voices.

God delights in small, simple things. David was the smallest and least in his family. He was no big deal. He was overlooked. Samuel, who anointed David, was also an unlikely leader. But he heard God's voice as a young man. The ultimate example of God showing off in weakness is Jesus of Nazareth. His ways are not our ways. God seems to have a special heart for the lost, least, last, lonely and the unloved.

Application:

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God's instruction = simple. Go back and do what you were called to do. He did. Returned home, kept honoring God w courage & passion, passed his mantle on to his successor, Elisha, & God carried him to heaven in a chariot of fire.

God gave us eyes to see + ears to hear. He wants us to listen to his voice & embrace what He is saying, to respond to His call & to do what He has called us, too.

All of us go into the Valley @ some point. That's not the issue. As Jesus asked the lame man at the pool of Bethesda – "Do you want to get well?" You can. There are places God has called you to serve. There are people who need you.

"What are you doing here, Mike, Michelle, John, and Jennifer?"