

Elijah's Disappointment

- Elijah is the reigning prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel
 - The ten tribes that had broken away from Judah and Benjamin to form their own nation in the years following Solomon's death
 - He served as Israel's prophet for about 8 years
 - And those were a difficult 8 years
 - They came during the reign of one of the most evil kings in Israel's history, a man named Ahab
 - He's almost as famous as his equally evil wife, Jezebel
 - Ahab and Jezebel made life miserable for Elisha because God used Elisha to cry out against all the evil that Ahab was doing in the Northern Kingdom
 - Ahab was best known for establishing the worship of Baal as an official, sanctioned religion in Israel
 - In fact he erected a temple to Baal in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom
 - He didn't just condone the worship of idols
 - Ahab had actually replaced the worship of Yahweh prescribed by the Law of Moses with a new system entirely
 - One introduced to the nation by the influence of his Phoenician wife, Jezebel
- These two people personified evil in their time
 - And they brought the nation of Israel to a new low
 - Baal worship was a particularly hideous form of idolatry
 - Baal is short for Baal-zebul
 - Lord of the flies or Lord of the flame is another potential interpretation

- It's pure Satan worship
 - Worship of Baal in Ahab's day involved incredible brutality & perversion
 - Prostitutes and orgies were frequently involved during services
- And sacrifices to Baal often involved – not animals
 - But children and infants
 - Parents would literally bring their youngest children and under the prompting of the Baal priests, they would leave their babies on the altar to be sacrificed to Baal
- These were the circumstances in Israel in the day that God raised up a prophet
 - Elijah, the Tishbite from Gilead, a region just east of the Jordan river
- Elijah immediately became a thorn in the side of Ahab and Jezebel
 - You may have already studied in 1Kings of Elijah's battles with Ahab and Jezebel
 - As he defended the honor of the Lord God and called the king and the people to repent
 - God empowered Elijah with supernatural powers to prove his authority and the veracity of his word
 - In one case, Elijah multiplies food for a widow similar to the fishes and loaves
 - He raises a widow's dead son to life like Jesus did in Luke 7
 - In perhaps his most famous miracle, he calls down fire from heaven against the priests of Baal on Mt Carmel
 - In all, Elijah's ministry involved 8 miracles

- But for all his God-given power, Elijah experienced very little triumph
 - Instead he frequently suffered periods of doubt and disillusionment
 - He would often react angrily to his circumstances and blame God
 - Sound familiar to some of us?
- Elijah's challenge was to accept that God didn't intend to use Elijah's ministry to achieve what God had placed on Elijah's heart to achieve
- Elijah was a voice crying out against a corrupt nation and king
 - And much of that time, he cried in futility
 - He spoke truth, showed God's power and called for repentance but except for a remnant, he got virtually no response from the people
 - And he certainly got no response from the king
 - And Elijah was understandably frustrated
 - He must have spent many days wondering to himself why God would call him into such a difficult life of service
 - But then grant him so little fruit
 - So little to show for it
- The low point comes in 1Kings 19

[1Kings 19:1](#) ¶ Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

[1Kings 19:2](#) 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."

[1Kings 19:3](#) And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

[1Kings 19:4](#) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

- Elijah had defeated and executed the Baal priests on Carmel
 - So in response Jezebel declares she will kill Elijah
 - And in fear for his life, Elijah flees for his life
 - Isn't that odd
 - Elijah successfully defeated and executed all the Baal priests through a supernatural intervention
 - Calling down flame from heaven
 - Yet one threat by the queen is enough to make Elijah run for his life
 - So he flees and hides
 - He travels from the northern kingdom of Israel into the southern kingdom of Judah
 - Then to Beersheba, which is the southern most town of Judah
 - The he crosses the border and goes further south in the wilderness with Moses and Jews wandered for 40 years
 - Finally he stops and begins his pity party
 - He asks God if he could die, because he's not better than his fathers
- This is the first clue that all is not as it seems with Elijah
 - When he says I am not better than my fathers, he's referring to the prophets who came before him
 - The earlier prophets and priest
 - Nathan, Gad, Samuel, Moses himself
 - Men who were frustrated in their efforts to keep Israel in line with God's word and the covenant
 - Elijah says to God, I failed
 - I didn't have any more success in changing the hearts and minds of your people than did the prophets before me

- So, God, you might as well just kill me
 - It's a pity party
 - Elijah isn't running away from Jezebel, he's running away from God
- Back at the beginning of chapter 19, Elijah hears that the Queen is seeking to kill him
 - She wants to kill Elijah because he had just destroyed the entire Baal priesthood
 - It seems odd that Elijah goes to such great lengths to run from her
 - After all, He had just defeated the priests supernaturally by calling down fire from heaven
 - Why would he fear one woman's anger when you know you have the power of God behind you?
 - More telling, where did Elijah choose to go?
 - He's headed to Mt Horeb, the mountain where Moses saw the glory of God and met with Him for 40 days
 - We're talking about a distance of some 250 miles
 - Just crossing into Judah provided enough protection from Jezebel
 - He didn't have to go beyond Judah into the wilderness
 - He's sulking, and he's running away from his ministry

[1Kings 19:5](#) He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

[1Kings 19:6](#) Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake *baked on hot stones*, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.

[1Kings 19:7](#) 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."

[1Kings 19:8](#) 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.

- Did you ever threaten to run away from home when you were a little kid?
 - I mean a small child
 - It's the old trick that kids play on their parents
 - We tell our parents we're running away from home
 - We packed our bag
 - We only took the really important stuff
 - Teddy bear
 - Toothbrush
 - Just to show we were really serious, we took our blankey
 - Then we walked out
 - We thought we could really show our parents
 - We would deny them the pleasure of our company
 - My wife and I used to see this happen
 - First, we thought great, that will cut our babysitting fees in half
 - Pack a lunch
 - Wave good bye
 - In other words, we feed their self-pity for a while hoping they will see the ridiculousness of their antics
- Well, God did the same thing for Elijah
 - Consider, he's in the middle of no where, with no provision, asking to die
 - Very dramatic, lots of self pity
 - But God knows what's in Elijah's heart, how Elijah really wants an audience with God

- That's why Elijah is headed to Mt Horeb, the place you go to meet with God
- And so God does what parents do
 - He packs a lunch
 - And in my favorite line in the chapter
 - The angel prepares a meal and says eat because the journey is too great for you
 - And then on the basis of that food, he walk for 40 days and nights to reach Mt Horeb
 - Clearly God is strengthening Elijah supernaturally
 - God has never abandoned Elijah, even in the midst of this exercise in self-pity and disappointment
- Elisha has fallen into the trap of pride...
 - First, Elijah assumed that he was a failure because he didn't get the expected result
 - His efforts and his ministry didn't bring about the repentance of Israel
 - In fact, he assumed that the prophets before him had also been failures
 - He assumed that if he and the other prophets had done their jobs correctly,
 - Then Israel would have returned to God – false
 - Elijah has been assuming that the outcome turned on his ability
 - Furthermore he's upset because he hasn't been successful and the failure reflects on him
 - Since Israel didn't repent, so it must have been his fault
 - And now he's sulking over it
 - It's a problem with pride

- In reality, the outcome of Elijah's ministry never rested on his ability
 - It rested on God's sovereign purpose and plan
 - And the nation's failure to repent was not a reflection of Elijah's abilities
 - I wonder what Elijah might have concluded if the nation of Israel DID repent under his leadership?
 - Would Elijah have taken credit?
 - We hope not, but I'm not so sure he wouldn't
 - He's certainly acting like someone who is disappointed that he didn't get to claim the success he was expecting
 - Whatever the extent of our efforts in ministry, ultimately the outcome is in God's control, not ours
 - If our efforts fall on deaf ears, then we dust off our sandals, as Jesus commanded, and we move on trusting God to bring us the harvest He determines when it suits His purposes
 - If we reap any harvest, God deserves the glory
 - Because it merely reflects God's gracious choice to appoint us some measure of success
 - Where does our own diligence and obedience fit in?
 - Doesn't God have expectations for us?
 - Of course He does
 - And if we are less than diligent in our service, we can expect to receive God's discipline,
 - But even when we are disobedient, we are never so important nor essential to God's work that we could put at risk His eternal plan or purposes
 - God's plan simply doesn't depend on us, though He delights to work through us
 - That fact doesn't excuse our disobedience, so we must be careful to follow God with all our heart

- But we can't let pride in that work overtake us and render us useless to God
 - Simply put, it's not about us...it's about the glory of God
 - LHCF exists for the glory of God...the Church exists too
- And God reminds Elijah of this fact a few verses later

[1Kings 19:9](#) ¶ Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

[1Kings 19:10](#) He said, "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."

[1Kings 19:11](#) ¶ So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking 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.

[1Kings 19:12](#) After the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.

[1Kings 19:13](#) When Elijah heard *it*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

[1Kings 19:14](#) Then he said, "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."

- Elijah is hiding in this cave in the wilderness on Mt. Horeb, where Moses received the Covenant
 - And in his self-pity, he whines to God about his situation
 - God keeps repeating the same question
 - What are you doing here?
 - And Elijah keeps answering that no one has listened to me; they all want to kill me
 - God knows that Elijah wants God to stroke his ego a little
 - He wants to see God like Moses did

- So he can chastise God for not giving him more success
 - He's like the child who threatens to run away hoping the parents will rush to him and give him an audience for his grievances
- And as Elijah stands at the entrance to the cave,
 - A wind comes by so strong it breaks the rocks
 - But God was not in the wind
 - And then an earthquake, and then fire
 - But neither contained the Lord
 - Then a gentle breeze
 - And in the breeze, Elijah recognizes God's presence and so he covers his face with his cloak to avoid seeing God's face
- And then God asks again, Why are you here?
 - Do you see God's point to Elijah?
 - Elijah expecting to see God at work in great, and manifold ways
 - Great demonstrations and great displays of his power
 - Much like the way in which Elijah called down the fire from heaven against the priests of Baal
 - And then he assumed that these great displays were the way the Lord would achieve His purpose on earth
 - And Elijah had begun to take great personal pride in being the instrument God would use for these great displays
- But Elijah had missed the point of God's work in Israel
 - God wasn't at work producing great change in Israel
 - He was at work in the hearts of a minority

- Spiritually speaking, this wasn't a time of earthquakes and fire, but of quiet breezes
- And Elijah needed to understand that so he might be content with what God was giving him
- So God asks again, Why are you in this cave?
 - Why are you two hundred miles away from where I need you?
 - Why are you pouting over what you didn't accomplish rather than taking joy in what God is at work doing?

[1Kings 19:15](#) ¶ The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; [1Kings 19:16](#) and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. [1Kings 19:17](#) "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. [1Kings 19:18](#) "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

- First, God tells Elijah to snap out of his self-pity
 - To get over himself basically (sometimes we need God to do that to us)
 - Go to Damascas and anoint Hazael king of Aram
 - Hazael was a brutal man who eventually became an instrument God used to bring judgment against the sinful Israelites
 - And anoint Jehu king of Israel in place of Ahab
 - A man who eliminated Baal worship entirely in Israel, though he brought other abominations in its place
 - And anoint another prophet, Elisha, as your successor
 - Finally, God makes clear that Elijah wasn't going to be the last prophet
 - That more men would come to warn Israel and Judah

- Finally, God makes clear his real purpose
 - I have held 7,000 men who won't bow their knee to Baal
 - They will remain true to the God of Israel
 - There will be a remnant
 - God is working in small numbers within Israel, like a breeze
- I think from time to time we all make the mistake Elijah made
 - Sometimes it comes in a work of ministry as it did for Elisha
 - Maybe we step out to volunteer somewhere in the church or a small group, Bible study, VBS, etc.
 - We take a step of faith, and then we attached expectations to it, and then things don't turn out the way we anticipated, so we get dejected
 - Sometimes it comes in our personal walk of faith
 - In some decision we make for ourselves in our job or family
 - Perhaps we step out in a business venture, or a new relationship
 - Perhaps we seek God's will only superficially at the beginning
 - God please bless my idea
- But then it fails to get us where we expected to go
 - That ministry effort falls short
 - I pastured a church for three years...
 - Have you ever stopped to consider that the problem might not have been your results – maybe the problem was your expectations
 - Elijah's expectations were that he would preach so effectively that he could convert everyone
 - But God had already determined that his words would not have that effect in Israel

- In fact, roughly 55 years earlier, God spoke to the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam
 - Jeroboam had been promised God's blessing if he obeyed the covenant and devoted his heart fully to God
 - But in a pattern that would come to typify the Northern kings, Jeroboam rejected God's word and sinned greatly
 - So God spoke these words to the king

[1Kings 14:7](#) "Go, say to Jeroboam, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over My people Israel, [1Kings 14:8](#) and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you—yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight; [1Kings 14:9](#) you also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back—[1Kings 14:10](#) therefore behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone.

[1Kings 14:14](#) "Moreover, the LORD will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who will cut off the house of Jeroboam this day and from now on. [1Kings 14:15](#) ¶ "For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the *Euphrates* River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the LORD to anger. [1Kings 14:16](#) "He will give up Israel on account of the sins of Jeroboam, which he committed and with which he made Israel to sin."

- God says that because Jeroboam disobeyed him in such an egregious way, he and his family would be cut off
 - And the nation of Israel would be scattered past the Euphrates
 - This scattering was a reference to the coming judgment when Assyria would take the nation of Israel captive and scatter the ten tribes such that they remain lost even to this day
 - Remember, God set this plan in motion over 50 years before Elisha began his ministry

- So when Elisha set his mind on the conversion of Israel, was his mind set on the right goal?
 - No
- Ironically, while Elijah saw his efforts as a failure, he was actually seeing the fulfilling of God's prophecy against Israel
 - Should he have run and hidden and indulged in self-pity?
 - No
 - Which is why God keeps asking why are you here?
- Elijah is needed in Damascus – 300 miles to the north
 - But because he set his own mind on the wrong goal
 - He created his own disappointment
 - Then used it as an excuse to run from his calling and to blame God
 - And now he has a long walk back
 - Ultimately, after Elijah anoints his successor Elisha, his ministry quickly comes to a close, with God taking Elijah up into heaven body and spirit as his followers watch from below
- There was another prophet who came centuries later
 - Whose ministry was also a call to repentance within Israel
 - He too battled seemingly in vain to persuade a nation to turn back to the Living God
 - He was given great power and authority to perform miracles and declare God's word
 - He too was persecuted
 - And after his ministry on earth, He was also raised up into heaven, body and spirit while his followers watched from below
 - You see, sometimes God's purpose in our lives is not to find success in the way we expect

- But instead, what we perceive as failure and disappointment is actually to greater glory and greater accomplishment in God's eternal plan
 - Like Jesus, who ultimately had to die on a cross to fulfill God's purposes in saving mankind
 - What would have happened if Jesus ran away to a cave and sulked because no one accepted His word