

Elijah, a Depressed Prophet
1 Kings 19:1-8
March 26, 2023

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library:

The Great Depression was the worst economic downturn in US History. It began in 1929 and did not subside until the end of the 1930s. A severe, worldwide economic disintegration was symbolized in the United States by the stock market crash on “Black Thursday,” October 24, 1929. The causes of the Great Depression were many and varied, but the impact was visible across the country. By the time FDR was inaugurated president on March 4, 1933, the banking system had collapsed, nearly 25% of the labor force was unemployed, and prices and productivity had fallen to 1/3 of their 1929 levels.

Psalms 38:4 (ESV) For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, life is too heavy for me.

1 Kings 19:4 (ESV) ...Oh LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.

Jonah 4:3 (ESV) Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

Job 3:11 (ESV) Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb, and expire?

Exodus 32:32 (ESV) But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.

Jeremiah 20:18 (ESV) Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?

Isaiah 53:3 (ESV) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Think out loud for a moment:

One Sunday morning in 1857, the famous British preacher C. H. Spurgeon shocked his five thousand listeners when he stood up in the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, to begin a sermon from Isaiah 41:14. Here’s what he said: “I have to speak today to myself; and whilst I shall be endeavoring to encourage those who are distressed and down-hearted, I shall be preaching, I trust to myself, for I need something which shall cheer my heart—why I cannot tell, wherefore I do not know, but I have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; my soul is cast down within me, I feel as if I had rather die than live; all that God hath done by me seems to be forgotten, and my spirit flags and my courage breaks down. ...I need your prayers.”

Charles Spurgeon - The Minister’s Fainting Fits:

“Though our trials may come from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, they are overruled and ordained by God, who treats them as an important part of our new life in Christ. For a start, we simply could not be like Christ if we are not treated like him and if we have a life of ease when he had so much pain. Do you expect to be crowned with gold where he was crowned with thorns? Shall lilies grow for you and briars for him?”

I. Elijah’s Pouting

1. He failed to consider the source of his threat

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

Charles Swindoll:

“Jezebel fits to a T the image of a domineering wife. First, she quickly took matters into her own hands. Second, she did her husband’s job her own way. Third, she turned to intimidation and schemes when she saw her weak-willed husband crumbling under pressure.”

Notice the first four words of Verse 3:

1 Kings 19:3–4 (ESV) Then he was afraid...

Charles Swindoll:

"This threat hadn't come from God; it had come from an unbelieving, carnal human being who lived her godless life light years from the things of God. If Elijah had been thinking clearly and realistically, he would have realized this. His good judgment, as well as his faith, would have provided this kind of self-talk: *"Hey, God is in control here, not Jezebel. Don't give a second thought to her threats. Trust God as you've done for years."*

2. He left his friend and servant

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

John Baker:

"A juniper tree or a broom tree deep in the wilderness has room for only one underneath it. Beneath the barren branches of discouragement and loneliness there is little shade. Elijah should have stayed with a friend who would have encouraged him and not allowed him to have such a deep pity party."

3. He had just come off a fresh victory

Takeaway:

Our most vulnerable moments usually happen right after a great victory. Mt. Carmel was already a faint memory. His energy and emotions were on a downward spiral.

4. He was physically and emotionally exhausted

Charles Spurgeon - The Minister's Fainting Fits:

"Excess of joy or excitement must be paid for by subsequent depressions. While the trial lasts, the strength is equal to the emergency; but when it is over, natural weakness claims the right to show itself."

5. He was absorbed in self-pity

1 Kings 19:4 (ESV) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

II. God's Provision

1. God gave Elijah a time of respite

1 Kings 19:7 (ESV) And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you."

Greek Proverb:

"If you keep the bow always bent, it will eventually break."

2. God clearly encouraged Elijah

1 Kings 19:9 (ESV) 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?"

Takeaway:

God could have scolded Elijah, but he didn't; he simply asked him a question: "What are you doing here?"

1 Kings 19:11–14 (ESV) 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.

Takeaway:

God drew Elijah out of the cave of self-pity, discouragement, and depression. Once Elijah was out of that cave, God asked him again, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

1 Kings 19:15–18 (ESV) 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.

3. God made sure Elijah had a close friend

1 Kings 19:19–21 (ESV) So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” ²¹ And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Chuck Swindoll:

“God has not designed us to live like hermits in a cave. He has designed us to live in friendship and fellowship, and community with others. That’s why the church, the body of Christ, is so very important, for it is there that we are drawn together in love and mutual encouragement. We’re meant to be a part of one another’s lives. Otherwise, we pull back, focusing on ourselves—thinking how hard we have it or how unfair others are.”

Let Me Say It This Way:

Often, we are more enamored with the gifts God gives us than with the Giver himself. When the Lord brings rest and refreshment, we become more grateful for the rest and refreshment than for the God who allows it. When God gives us a good friend, we become absorbed in that friendship and so preoccupied with the friend that we forget it was our gracious God who gave us the friend. We so easily focus on the wrong things.