

Eliyahu ~ Part 10

In my last post, we learned that the **Rain Returns to Israel** in **1 Kings 18:41- 46**. In this post, **Eliyahu** encounters **The Enemies Message of Danger** in **1 Kings 19:1-4**.

Danger, Danger Eliyahu

¹ Ach'av told Izevel everything Eliyahu had done and how he had put all the prophets to the sword. ² Then Izevel sent a messenger to say to Eliyahu, "May the gods do terrible things to me and worse ones besides if by this time tomorrow I haven't taken your life, just as you took theirs!" ³ On seeing that, he got up and fled for his life. When he arrived in Be'er-Sheva, in Y'hudah, he left his servant there; ⁴ but he himself went a day farther into the desert until he came to a broom tree. He sat down under it and prayed for his own death. "Enough!" he said. "Now, Adonai, take my life. I'm no better than my ancestors." ~ 1 Kings 19:1-4 (CJB)

Before getting into our passage, let's pause for some historical perspectives. It encourages me when I read *"Eliyahu was only a human being like us, yet he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and no rain fell on the Land for three years and six months."* ~ James 5:17 (CJB) When James wrote those words, he undoubtedly had 1 Kings 18 and 19 in mind, for in these chapters we see **Eliyahu** at his highest and at his lowest.

We can learn from our defeats as well as their successes. Furthermore, by studying passages like 1 Kings 19, we're reminded to give glory to the Master and not to His servants (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). We're also told to prepare for what may happen after the victories God gives us. How quickly we can move from the mountaintop of triumph to the valley of testing! We need to humble ourselves before the Lord and get ready for the trials that usually follow the victories.

Warren Wiersbe opines:

*If **Eliyahu** could have described to a counselor how he felt and what he thought, the counselor would have diagnosed his condition as a textbook case of burnout. **Eliyahu** was physically exhausted and had lost his appetite. He was depressed about himself and his work and was being controlled more and more by self-pity. "I only am left!" Instead of turning to others for help, he isolated himself and - worst of all - he wanted to die. The prophet concluded that he had failed in his mission and decided it was time to quit. But the Lord didn't see it that way. He always looks beyond our changing moods and impetuous prayers, and He pities us the way parents pity their discouraged children (Psalm 103:13-14). The chapter (19) shows us how tenderly and patiently God deals with us when we're in the depths of despair and feel like giving up. ¹*

The chapter begins with **Eliyahu** running away and trying to save himself. Then the prophet argues with the Lord and tries to defend himself. Finally, he obeys the Lord and yields himself and is restored to service. In all of this, **Eliyahu** was responding to four different messages.

The Enemy's Message of Danger

When the torrential rain began to fall, **Izevel** was in **Yizre'el** and may have thought that **Ba'al** the storm god had triumphed on **Mount Karmel**. However, when **Ach'av** arrived home, he told her a much different story. **Ach'av** was a weak man, but he should have stood with **Eliyahu** and honored the Lord who had so dramatically demonstrated His power. But **Ach'av** had to live with Queen **Izevel**, and without her support, he

¹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament

knew he was nothing. If ever there was a strong-willed ruler with a gift for doing evil, it was **Izevel**. Neither **Ach'av** nor **Izevel** accepted the clear evidence given on **Mount Karmel** that **Adonai** was the only true and living God. Instead of repenting and calling the nation back to serving the Lord, **Izevel** declared war on God and His faithful servant **Eliyahu**, and **Ach'av** allowed her to do it.

Why did **Izevel** send a letter to **Eliyahu** when she could have sent soldiers and had him killed? He was in **Yizre'el**, and the deed could have been easily accomplished on such a wild and stormy night. **Izevel** wasn't only an evil woman; she was also a shrewd strategist who knew how to make the most of **Ba'al**'s defeat on **Mount Karmel**. **Ach'av** was a quitter, but not his wife!

Eliyahu was now a very popular man. Like Moshe, he had brought fire from heaven, and like Moshe, he had slain the idolaters (Leviticus 9:24; Numbers 25). If **Izevel** transformed the prophet into a martyr, he might influence people more by his death than by his life. If **Eliyahu** disappeared, the people would wonder what had happened, and they would be prone to drift back into worshiping **Ba'al** and letting **Ach'av** and **Izevel** have their way.

Izevel may have suspected that **Eliyahu** was a candidate for a physical and emotional breakdown after his demanding day on **Mount Karmel**, and she was right. Her letter achieved its purpose and **Eliyahu** fled from **Yizre'el**. In a moment of fear, when he forgot all that God had done for him the previous three years, **Eliyahu** took his servant, left Israel, and headed for **Be'er-Sheva**, the southernmost city in **Y'hudah**.

For three years, **Eliyahu** had not made a move without hearing and obeying the Lord's instructions (17:2-3, 8-9; 18:1), but now he was running ahead of the Lord to save his own life. When God's servants get out of God's will, they're liable to do all sorts of foolish things.

But why flee to **Y'hudah**, especially when Jehoram, king of **Y'hudah**, was married to **Ach'av**'s daughter **Athaliah** (2 Kings 8:16-19; 2 Chronicles 21:4-7). This is the infamous **Athaliah** who later ruled the land and tried to exterminate all of David's heirs to the throne (2 Kings 11). The safest place for any child of God is the place dictated by the will of God, but **Eliyahu** didn't stop to seek God's will. He traveled 90 to 100 miles to **Be'er-Sheva** and left his servant there. If the enemy came after **Eliyahu**, his servant would be safer someplace else. Furthermore, if the servant didn't know where **Eliyahu** was, he couldn't inform against him.

Be'er-Sheva had a special meaning to the Jews because of its associations with Abraham (Genesis 21:22, 33), Isaac (26:33), and Jacob (46:1). The broom tree flourishes in the wilderness and provides shade for flocks and herds and travelers. The branches are thin and supple like those of the willow and are used to bind bundles. The roots of the plant are used for fuel and make excellent charcoal (Psalm 120:4). As **Eliyahu** sat under its shade, he did a wise thing - he prayed, but he didn't pray a very wise prayer. *"Enough!" he said. "Now, Adonai, take my life."* Then he gave his reason: *"I'm no better than my ancestors."* But God never asked him to be better than anybody else, but only to hear His Word and obey it.

The combination of emotional burnout, weariness, hunger, and a broad sense of failure, plus lack of faith in the Lord, had brought **Eliyahu** into a deep depression. But there was also an element of pride involved, and some self-pity, for **Eliyahu** was sure that his courageous ministry on **Mount Karmel** would bring the nation to its knees. Perhaps he was also hoping that **Ach'av** and **Izevel** would repent and turn from **Ba'al** to God. His expectations weren't fulfilled, so he considered himself a failure. But the Lord rarely allows His servants to see all the good they have done because we walk by faith and not by sight, and **Eliyahu** would learn that there were 7,000 people in Israel who had not bowed to **Ba'al** and worshiped him. No doubt his ministry had influenced many of them.

In my next post, we continue to explore the Biblical story of **Eliyahu**. In this passage, **Eliyahu** hears **The Angels Message of Grace** in **1 Kings 19:5-8**.