

Elijah-The Discouraged Prophet

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2:09 PM

Biblical Case Studies in Fear\Worry\Anxiety\Despair (1 Kings 18-19)

I. Troubler of Israel (1 Kings 18:1-19)

A. God Promises Rain (1 Kings 18:1-2)

1. Severe drought and famine in Samaria (1 Kings 17:1-7; 1 Kings 18:1-2)

a. Word of the Lord came to Elijah (v1)

1) Go show yourself to Ahab(v2)

2) And I will send the rain (v2)

b. Ahab and Obadiah (v3-6)

1) Obadiah's position (v3)

2) Hid 100 prophets (v4)

a) Fears the Lord more than Jezebel

3) Ahab's instructions to save the herds (v5-6)

2. Elijah's meeting with Obadiah (v7-15)

a. Obadiah recognizes Elijah (v7)

1) Elijah's command(v8)

2) Obadiah's fearful response (v9-14)

a) How have I sinned?

b) Fears that Elijah may not show up

c) Fears for his life

3) Elijah's command (v15)

a) Elijah says he will show up

4) Obadiah obeys (v16)

B. The message (v17-19)

1. Is it you the troubler of Israel? (v17)

2. Ahab is the troubler of Israel. (v18)
 - a. Abandoned the commands of the Lord
 - b. And whole-heartily followed the Baals (connected to fertility, crops, prosperity)
 - 1) False worship
 - a) Involved perverted sexual behavior, child sacrifice
 - b) Not simply misguided or in error, outright wickedness
 - c) Baal means master or owner, many types of Baals (often associated with Asherah)
3. Meet me at Mt. Carmel (v19-20)
 - a. All of Israel
 - b. 450 prophets of Baal
 - c. 400 prophets of Asherah
 - 1) Do not appear to have been present, maybe because of loyalty to Jezebel

II. The Contest (1 Kings 18:20-40)

A. Who Will You Follow (v21)

1. Limping between two opinions (v21)
 - a. But the people did not answer (v21)
 - b. Elijah notes he is outnumbered (v22)
 - 1) Apparently forgot about the 100 prophets his by Obadiah
2. The challenge (v23-24)
 - a. The people approve of Elijah's challenge (v24)
 - b. Baal goes first (v25-26)
 - 1) Call upon your idol (v25)
 - 2) No answer and limping (v26)
 - c. Elijah mocks Baal and the 450 prophets (v27)
 - 1) The 450 are greatly distressed (v28)
 - 2) Still there is no answer (v29)

B. Elijah's Turn (v30-40)

1. 12 stones for an altar (v30-32)
 - a. A deep trench (v32)
 - b. Preparing the sacrifice (v32)
 - c. Use plenty of water(v33)
 - d. Repeat and repeat again (33-35)
2. Elijah's prayer (v36-37)
 - a. God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (v36)
 - 1) Know I am your servant (v36)
 - 2) Here at your command (v37)
 - 3) Answer me (v37)
 - b. So that they may know who is God and who is not and their hearts are turned back (37)
 - 1) Fire comes down (v38)
 - 2) People filled with fear of the Lord(v39)
 - 3) Prophets of Baal seized and killed (v40)

C. The Lord Sends the Rain (41-46)

1. Elijah tells Ahab he hears the sound of rain (v41-42)
2. Look to the sea 7x (v43-44)
 - a. Tell Ahab to head to Jezreel (v44)
 - b. The rain becomes a deluge (v45)
3. Elijah also goes to Jezreel (v46)

III. Elijah's Fear and Despair (1 Kings 19:1-21)

A. Ahab tells Jezebel (v1)

1. All that Elijah had done (v1)
2. All the prophets of Baal are dead (v1)
3. Jezebel's threat (v2)

B. Elijah flees (v3)

1. Elijah depressed (v4-5a)
2. Elijah comforted (5b-8)

C. The Lord Speaks

1. The question (v9)
 - a. Elijah's self-pity and despair (v10)
2. How God spoke
 - a. Not the wind (v11)
 - 1) Not the earthquake (v11)
 - 1) Not the fire (v12)
 - 1) But a whisper (v12)
3. The question repeated (v13)
 - a. Elijah's self-pity and despair (v14)
 - b. The Lord speaks and commands (v15-17)
 - c. The Lord corrects (v18)
 - d. The call of Elisha (v19-21)

Application Outline

Thursday, July 19, 2012
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Biblical Case Studies in Fear\Worry\Anxiety\Despair (1 Kings 18-19)

Reading: 1 Kings 18-19

Introduction

1. Have you ever been disappointed in some way?
2. Have you ever been discouraged in some way.
3. What's the difference between disappointment and discouragement?
4. Have you ever despaired?
5. What is despair?
6. What is depression?

Spiritual depression

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a British pastor and theologian wrote a classic titled *Spiritual Depression*. Jones was way ahead of his time. At a time when pastors almost always referred depressed people to psychology, Jones referred them to spiritual resources thus showing them, a better way. Here's one of his classic quotes

"A depressed Christian is a contradiction in terms, and he is a very poor recommendation for the gospel. Nothing is more important, therefore, than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people, looking at us, the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad, to be morbid, and that the Christian is one who "scorns delights and lives laborious days." *Spiritual Depression*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones

"Indeed I can put it, finally like this; the ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief. For if it were not or unbelief even the devil could do nothing. It is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to God that we go down before him and fall before his attacks. *Spiritual Depression*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Background Commentary and Counseling Application (1 Kings 18:1-19)

- A. The life of a prophet was a lonely life.
 1. Pronouncing God's judgment, rebuking people for their sin, especially kings and queens of their sins does not usually make one popular.

2. Ahab and Jezebel hate Elijah and anyone else who speaks for God. Their leadership of Israel has taken Israel down the path of rank idol worship (1 Kings 16:29-34).
 3. Elijah appears literally out of no where to pronounce judgment (drought/famine) and so he and any one that agrees with him is to be hunted and killed by Jezebel's assassins.
- B. Elijah's state of mind.
1. Prior to the episode on Mt. Carmel God demonstrated his love, grace and power to Elijah.
 - a. By providing for his needs, the brook Cherith and the raven episode (1 Kings 17:2-7) during the famine
 - b. by raising the widow's son from the dead.(1 Kings 17:17-24)
- C. Emotional Observations
1. Sense of confidence and assurance in God (God provides)
 2. No sense of a fear of man at this time (1 Kings 18)
 3. Key Application:
 - a. At this point Elijah is not held hostage by Ahab's appraisal of him nor is concerned about the death threat.
 - b. Elijah's theology (belief system) control his emotions rather than the other way around.
 - c. What we believe ultimately controls our emotions.

Observations and Counseling Application (1 Kings 18:1-2)

- A. Note that in verses 1-2 there is one command and one promise.
1. Show yourself to Ahab
 2. I [God] will bring rain
 3. Elijah, having experienced God's faithfulness prior had confidence in God's promise now.
- B. The problem of expectations
1. We experience disappointment, discouragement and despair because we expect something.

- a. Expectation is another word for desire.
 - b. If we get what we expect we are usually happy. If not, sad.
 - c. We sink into despair when simple desires are corrupted into demands.
 - a. Unmet demands are blocks to our happiness and the resulting emotion is a heavy sadness we call depression or despair.
2. The Bible calls this state "sorrow without hope."
 - a. Psalm 119:28a-My soul melts away for sorrow;
 - b. Psalm 31:10a-For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
 - c. Psalm 13:2aHow long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
 3. Elijah, at this point is strong and courageous in the Lord.

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 18:7-15

A. Obadiah's Fears

1. Is Obadiah really happy to see Elijah?
 - a. Discouragement and despair often set in because something in our lives rocks our comfort zone.
 - b. Elijah is a threat to Obadiah's comfort zone for obvious reasons and "is it you" is a hopeful, "I sure hope not."
 - c. Elijah simply says "yes it's me" and "this is what I want you to do."
 - 1) "Go and do" is part of the prescription for discouragement and despair.
 - 2) Discouragement becomes despair when we start to reduce function, that is, give up on responsibilities.
 - 3) Despair becomes more and more personally destructive when we give up on personal responsibilities. Psychology calls this state clinical depression.
2. Clinical depression is the result of not handling disappointing circumstances biblically.

- 1) Instead of responding to discouraging circumstances with faith, we respond with further dark thoughts, thus creating a downward spiral of despair.
- 2) For the Christian this often means using how they feel (sad, angry, etc) as a reason to be disobedient. (Obadiah does not want to obey Elijah because he is afraid-simple as that.)

B. Elijah does not engage Obadiah in any chit-chat. He simply says "go and do."

1. Discouragement\Despair is a type of paralysis and part of the cure is go and do regardless of how one feels.
 - a. It is actually the simplest solution because anything less than go and do results in further paralysis.
 - b. Slippery slope of depression: Disappointment\Discouragement\Despair \Destruction
2. At this point in the narrative Elijah has a God-centered obedience orientation while Obadiah has a feelings orientation.
 - a. Having a gospel-centered obedience orientation rather than a feelings orientation for the Christian is key in over coming despair and discouragement.

"A depressed Christian is a contradiction in terms, and he is a very poor recommendation for the gospel. Nothing is more important, therefore, than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people, looking at us, the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad, to be morbid, and that the Christian is one who "scorns delights and lives laborious days." Spiritual Depression, Martyn Lloyd-Jones

3. Obadiah reacts to Elijah's "go and do" with a full fledged panic attack. He sees the command as punishment for his sins and that suggests guilt, either real or false guilt.
 - a. We do not know what Obadiah feels guilty about but if it is sin, he should. It is not popular to say so but guilt over unrepentant sin is a factor with discouragement and despair.
 - b. The person sinking into despair is almost entirely self-absorbed and filled with self-pity, hence the sin.
 - 1) Obadiah is so afraid he questions Elijah's sincerity. "Are you really going to show up as promised?"
 - 2) Obadiah is filled with doubt as we often are when discouraged. "Will this or that really turn out okay?" "Can I really trust him or her

to do what they said they would?"

- 3) This is the unbelief issue that Jones referred to. Obadiah's self-talk reveals the tempter. Did God really say?

C. Stinkin Thinkin and Negative Self-Talk

1. Negative self-talk is the result of prior thinking.

- a. Listening to negative self-talk gives the devil a foothold and results in further paralysis.
- b. For the discouraged Christian doubt centers around the idea of whether or not God is really in control, is God really good, or will God really keep his promises or does God really intend this or that for good?
- c. "awfulism"
 - 1) Obadiah's behavior is the result of his state of mind, and fed by what he is thinking about. His comfort zone is being threatened and he imagines the worst possible outcome.
 - 2) Obadiah fears man more than he fears God.

"Fits of depression come over most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy." Spurgeon

2. Elijah's response to Obadiah

- a. And after all that what does Elijah say? Obadiah, I think you need a rest or possibly therapy because you are coming unglued here. No, he simply says, "I will show up."
- b. Obadiah goes and does.

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 18:17-20

A. Ahab's fears

1. Ahab asks. "Is it you troubler of Israel?" Perhaps within the question is a hint of "I hope not" just like Obadiah.
2. Ahab was wrong about the ultimate cause of trouble.
 - a. In biblical counseling what Ahab did is called a blame shift. It's an unwillingness to take responsibility for one's words, actions or behavior

or to excuse them because of someone or something else.

- b. When a person breaks down into despair the blame falls on their feelings.
 - 1) "I do not feel like getting up in the morning."
 - 2) "What is the use" is my attitude.
 - 3) Hopeless and helpless are the hallmarks of deep despair

B. Elijah's Confrontation

- 1. Confronting Idolatry with biblical truth
 - a. The worship of idols begins with violating the first commandment. You shall not have strange gods.
 - b. When we serve strange gods instead of the one true God words, attitudes and behavior follows.
 - c. The idols of our time go by different names.
- 2. Elijah tells the assembled throng they cannot have it both ways. (syncretism)
 - a. Syncretism is the blending of gods with your own. The Israelites didn't necessarily disavow Yahweh all together they just added Baal and Asherah to the mix.
 - b. Evangelical syncretism is sophisticated and subtle.
 - 1) We do not deny Christ as Savior, we simply look to cheap substitutes to give us what we want.
 - 2) Often these false Saviors are comfort, power, control or affirmation or whatever words tend to mean the same.
 - 3) When we do not get what we want, we despair.

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 18:20-40

- A. Elijah organizes the event so there will be no doubt as to who is God.
 - 1. Elijah is full of confidence. You could say he's on a spiritual mountain-top.
 - 2. He doesn't merely make his point but he openly mocks the idols and their priests when the idols do not answer.
 - 3. God answers his prayer and God is glorified before Israel.

- a. God is the central figure in the story.
- b. For the despairing Christian God is no longer central in their story.

"Indeed I can put it, finally like this; the ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief. For if it were not or unbelief even the devil could do nothing. It is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to God that we go down before him and fall before his attacks. Spiritual Depression, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression

- B. Elijah destroys the symbols and representatives of Idolatry
 - 1. The Puritans would say it means to be ruthless with your idols. Put them to death. Don't tolerate them, don't indulge them.
 - 2. Do whatever it takes to get rid of them and subdue them. Jesus is more direct in the NT when he says if your eye causes you to sin put it out, if your hand then cut it off.
 - 3. Renouncing a demand for power, control, affirmation, pleasure, etc.

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 18:41-46

- A. God keeps his promise.
- B. Elijah sends Ahab to Jezreel and back to Jezebel.
- C. Elijah follows and actually beats Ahab back to Jezreel

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 19:1-8

- A. Ahab tells Jezebel the whole story.
 - 1. She pitches a fit and I suspect that Ahab was afraid of her and her temper.
 - 2. Jezebel threatens, Elijah flees
 - a. How do we explain the sudden reversal of emotion?
 - 1) Did God tell Elijah to go to Jezreel?
 - 2) What were Elijah's expectations in going to Jezreel?
 - a) Believed the war was over?
 - b) Believed he would find Jezebel and other prophets dead?
 - c) Believed Ahab and Jezebel would repent?

b. Jezebel, alive and well and unrepentant

- 1) Elijah's fears (emotion drives action, faith reduced)
- 2) Elijah's expectations exceeded God's actual promises
- 3) Elijah suddenly doubts God (is in control?)

Observations and Counseling Application 1 Kings 19:9-21

A. God's Reaction

1. And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 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." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. (1 Kings 19:5-8 ESV)
2. Elijah receives grace and mercy
 - a. The person in the despair/destitution stage seems to have lost their ability to see reality through the lens of faith.
 - b. To them, life is seen through the lens of feelings.
 - c. It's like trying to explain red and green to a person who is color blind. Your eyes can filter color, theirs cannot. The person controlled by feelings has lost their ability to see reality through eyes of faith.
 - d. I think how God treats Elijah in this regard is insightful because He starts to help Elijah once again see reality through eyes of faith and grace by caring for him.
 - e. Elijah is being prepared for future use, although at this point he does not feel like it!
 - f. In helping the depressed Christian the goal is to help them see reality through the eyes of faith.

B. Horeb will be where Elijah encounters God just as he encountered the false Baals on Carmel through eyes of faith.

1. God starts to give Elijah a new plan which may start to speak Elijah's new expectations and thus start to give him renewed hope.

2. Someone once remarked that stress is self-induced suffering.
 - a. Emotions are powerful and can and do distort truth
 - b. In Elijah's case, God is taking the first step to get Elijah back on the hope path.
 - c. Elijah responds to the Word of the Lord by heading on out to Horeb another name for Mt. Sinai where God spoke to Moses.
 - a. Elijah no doubt feeling just a wee bit better knowing that God has not abandoned him.

C. Elijah's Self-pity

1. 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?" 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. Vss 9-10
 - a. God graciously provides shelter for Elijah, a nice comfortable cave, with running water and in door toilet. Well, maybe not, but way better than being outside.
 - b. God takes the next step and asks Elijah the question we would have thought God would have asked earlier.
 - c. God knows full well what Elijah is doing in the cave but wants Elijah to explain.
2. Controversial passage. Some say Elijah is full of self-pity and suicidal
 - a. Self-pity is most certainly part of despair, destitution and destruction. Because Elijah says he wants to die some say he's suicidal, not knows it is wrong and so asks God to take him.
 - b. He feels alone, like everything God has used him for has been in vain and maybe just a little miffed at God since Jezebel wants him dead.
 - 1) Self-pity is a sinful reaction to stress.
 - 2) The emotion reveals the heart. It's the belief you are a victim and victimhood is starting to define you.
3. Despair over what?
 - a. Maybe so, but maybe Elijah is in despair over Israel because he does not see the end of the story.
 - b. In other words God, we seem to have won the battle but did we did not win

the war, because it still seems Israel is in the throws of idolatry although they are minus a few prophets.

- 1) If I were to put this into a modern context I'd say that maybe Elijah is lamenting the fact we live in a country that does not value human life.
- 2) He was used to pass a law that says you must have a ultrasound before you elect to have an abortion but abortion is still legal.
- 3) It's not wrong to grieve the things that grieve God and I'm just willing to give Elijah some slack here.
- 4) Elijah down, but not out

D. God Reveals and Directs

1. At Mt. Carmel God revealed himself in spectacular ways including fire. Here God's voice is found in a low whisper.
2. God again asks the question, what are you doing here Elijah. Elijah answers in the same way he did the first time:
 - a. 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.
3. God does not deal with Elijah's response, and instead gives him another set of responsibilities.

" 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. 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. 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. 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."vss 14-18

E. God's expectations versus Elijah's expectations

- ◇ God will finish what he started with Elijah
- ◇ God is in control, not Elijah
- ◇ Elijah did what God wanted him to do, but expected closure
- ◇ It was not about Elijah's efforts, simply his faithfulness to the task at hand.
- ◇ Perhaps Elijah's righteous desires had turned into demands
- ◇ When his demands were not met, his faith wavered and he fled in fear.

- ◇ God shakes Elijah out of the doldrums with a new set of responsibilities
- ◇ Go and do
- ◇ God's future promise

The key for the Christian in overcoming discouragement and despair is to once again see reality through eyes of faith and not succumb to feelings that distort reality and render one paralyzed.

Questions for Community Groups

- 1) How could you use the story of Elijah to give encouragement to a friend who is discouraged or in despair?
- 2) Can you explain the difference between living by feelings or living by faith?
- 3) How does the gospel give hope to the discouraged or despairing?