

1 Kings 19:1-18 • God's Definition of Victory

Introduction

It's important to understand exactly who Jezebel is and what she represents both at this time in history and as a prophetic symbol in future Scripture.

- The historical Jezebel is the daughter of the King of Sidon (Sidon is both a city and the center of a foreign power to the north of Israel) given in a political marriage to then-king of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahab. Even being a powerful Phoenician or "queen-to-be", Jezebel was no normal woman as she was a chief representative of Baal. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel will cause the introduction of false worship so intense that all but 7,000 Israelites will convert to her religion.
- Ahab's marriage to Jezebel is symbolic of one's unfaithfulness to God. The relationship between God and His people is repeatedly expressed in terms of marriage with Israel – or Believers – often described as a bride. This is a picture not just of unfaithfulness but of adultery, as well as rejection of the One True God in favor of a false god.
- In Revelation 2:18-29 in the message to the church at Thyatira, Jezebel is mentioned: "But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds." She's not only referenced here as a false prophetess who teaches false worship – just like the historical Jezebel – but note that her actions are equated to committing adultery. In Revelation 2:24 her works are called "the deep things of Satan", and the point is that Jezebel is not a "back-slidden" person or temporarily straying from the path; she's an active agent of Satan to deceive and lead astray all who would follow the One True God – just like the historical Jezebel.

How does a Believer deal with false prophets/false teachers? What is God's role for Believers in the political and spiritual battles that ensue?

¹Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.

[Read v.1]

Q: What had Elijah accomplished in the previous chapter? Was it limited only to killing the false prophets?

A: Everyone was gathered on Mount Carmel to choose between the Lord or Baal. (1 Kings. 18:21, *Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."* But the people did not answer him a word.) This was demonstrated first by 450 prophets of Baal calling out for hours for him to supernaturally provide the fire for their sacrifice to him. When it didn't happen, Elijah called on the Lord Who immediately responded. Everyone witnessed the power of the Lord through His lone prophet Elijah and the colossal failure of the false god Baal through his 450 prophets. The false prophets were seized and killed, which would be in keeping with the Old Testament Law. Elijah followed up by ending the long draught, further demonstrating God's love for those that turn to Him.

Q: How would you characterize Ahab's report to Jezebel?

A: He de-emphasized the things that God had demonstrated through Elijah and focused on the one thing that would greatly anger Jezebel, the leader of Baal worship, that her prophets had been killed. Ahab makes just passing mention of God sending the fire then rain and that Jezebel's prophets had failed.

Q: What does this reveal about the character of Ahab and Jezebel?

A: They were impervious to signs from God because they never had any intention of following Him regardless. Unlike those that witnessed the event and returned to God by destroying the false prophets – therefore choosing God over Baal – Ahab and Jezebel were never going to be swayed by prophecy, signs, or miracles; they were on Satan's side.

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²Then 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.”

³And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

[Read v.2]

Q: What does Jezebel reveal about her spiritual condition in her personal threat against Elijah?

A: She believes Elijah to be a mere man with no power or support of the One True God. She is unaffected by God’s signs through Elijah and displays no fear of God whatsoever.

[Read v.3]

Q: Does God sometimes tell us to run? Are there biblical examples of such?

A: Yes. Two prominent examples are David and Paul.

Q: In this instance, did the Lord tell Elijah to run?

A: No. This a contrast to His previous pattern of telling Elijah were to go.

Q: In looking at Elijah’s life to this point and the decisions and actions that resulted, what is different in this situation from the rest?

A: Elijah did not inquire of the Lord. The implication is that Elijah was not afraid previously when outnumbered or in hostile territory as he was acting on the authority and instructions of God. In this case Elijah may be acting on his own.

Q: Why is it significant that v.3 specifically mentions that Beersheba, the place to which Elijah fled, is in Judah?

A: Jezebel and all that took place was in the northern kingdom of Israel. Running to Beersheba in Judah equates to fleeing to another country altogether in order to feel safe from the threat. She can’t reach him there. This actually should have been far enough.

Q: What might be inappropriate about Elijah fleeing to Judah?

A: Elijah’s ministry was to Israel. And just as Jezebel shows no fear of God even though great works have been accomplished through Elijah, so Elijah is showing no faith in God’s power to continue to work through him even though he has **always** been alone.

⁴But 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."

[Read v.4]

Q: There are two parts to Elijah's statement that reveal his thoughts. What can be discerned from his statement, "It is enough..."?

A: He seems to have reached his personal limit. It's an expression of the way he feels emotionally, that he can no longer continue in his current state. He can continue no further on his own power.

Q: What about the 2nd part, "...I am not better than my fathers."?

A: It's an admission of spiritual exhaustion and failure, that he consciously acknowledges he has been disobedient and come up short obeying God's will and command.

Q: Given what has happened to this point, what might be the cause of Elijah's actions?

A: Perhaps after years of being on the run (he'd just spent the previous 3 years hiding out with a widow in Sidon), and finally experiencing the tremendous victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah thought the battle was over, only to learn it had really just begun. Perhaps Elijah assumed the signs on Mount Carmel would change even Jezebel's heart and so he experienced a crisis of faith when they did not.

Point: The source of the conflict was Jezebel. Eliminating her prophets was but a first step, not the end. Victory entails eliminating the source, not just the messengers, and leading the people in repentance so that they don't fill the "vacuum" with yet **ANOTHER** false god.

"When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

Luke 11:24-26

Consider: How does this apply to us when we feel unappreciated for our hard work in a ministry that appears to yield minimal results? What is our "volunteer" mentality – is it just for the emotional peaks or is it for the long haul? Do we continually go back to God at **EVERY** turn – victory **AND** difficulty – to seek His guidance?

Q: Elijah ran to Beersheba, but what is the significance at the beginning of v.4 that he "...went a day's journey into the wilderness..."?

A: For one thing, Elijah would not be held personally accountable by anyone observing his behavior. He was already physically "safe" by being in a whole other country from Jezebel's reach. Going further into the wilderness by himself insured that no one could argue with the way he felt or saw things.

⁵He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." ⁶Then 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. ⁷The angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." ⁸So 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.

⁹Then 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?"

¹⁰He 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."

¹¹So 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.

¹²After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. ¹³When 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?"

¹⁴Then 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."

[Read v.5-8]

Q: Is the Lord's initial response to Elijah surprising? Would this be our first response to someone we felt was "running the wrong way" or "running away" from something?

A: It's a wonderful testimony to God's character that He desires a relationship with us. God recognizes that Elijah's first words concerned physical exhaustion followed by spiritual exhaustion. God first takes care of the first in order to address the latter.

Q: Is there a significance to Elijah's decision to go to Horeb?

A: Nothing is specifically stated, but we might infer that since Horeb is where the Law was given through Moses and a place where God was known to have spoken to man, that perhaps Elijah is "going to the source", seeking direct communication with God. His faith, once in no need of anything more than inquiring of and obedience to the Lord now requires something more.

[Read v.9-14]

Q: Why does a cave on Horeb sound familiar? What past event does this bear a close resemblance to?

A: The cleft in the rock on this very mountain where Moses saw the Lord pass by. "Horeb" is another name for Mount Sinai.

Q: What is the error in Elijah's thinking in both v.10 and 14? (Hint: Read ahead v.18)

A: Elijah's assertion, "...I alone am left...". There were still 7,000 Believers in Israel who did not flee from Jezebel's jurisdiction and were far less safe than Elijah. Also, he was aware that Obadiah safely hid 100 prophets from Ahab and Obadiah. (1 Kings 18:13)

Q: What is the lesson being communicated by the Lord to Elijah through the various manifestations of v.11-13?

A: All of these signs had at one time or another accompanied God's voice. For instance, the earth quaked when He gave the Law to Israel at Mt. Sinai, the burning bush for Moses, and out of the whirlwind to Job. The fact that God was not found in these things for Elijah is probably a teaching that Elijah already had what he needed, the Word of God, which alone was powerful enough to accomplish the mission.

Q: To Elijah's credit, what did he recognize concerning the wind, earthquake and fire?

A: That God was not in them. Elijah did not respond to grand signs that some might believe represented God's mighty presence, but responded to God's actual presence. God first addressed his physical and emotional needs so that Elijah was prepared to respond to God's spiritual treatment.

¹⁵The 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; ¹⁶and 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. ¹⁷It 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. ¹⁸Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

[Read v.15-18]

Q: At the end of Elijah’s flight, wherein he purportedly goes all the way to Horeb – a place equated with the very Person of God – in order to save himself as the alleged last prophet/Believer left alive, what does Elijah find out?

A: Not only that there are 7,000 faithful still remaining in Israel, but that God has had a plan all along to deal with the situation. It’s very possible that if Elijah had inquired of the Lord from the outset that instead of fleeing on his own first to Judah and then all the way to Horeb, that God might have conveyed the same instructions as in these verses and sent Elijah to Hazael, Jehu and Elisha **then** as He is doing now.

Q: Was it God’s plan that Elijah would have to carry on and win the battle by himself?

A: Elijah was a key component in God’s plan, to be sure, but what began on Mount Carmel through the one man Elijah was to be continued on to victory through many others. Just as the small whisper of air revealed God’s presence and great power to overcome all things, so Elijah was but a small witness to God beginning to accomplish a greater work through more and more people.

Overall Application

- *Are we confident that we are presently where God wants us regardless of the circumstances?*
- *Are we operating on the way we **feel** or **assume** things should be as opposed to acting in faith that all things are in **His** hands?*
- *How often do we judge our spiritual “success” in terms of this lesson, in that we are responsible only for our relationship with Him and all results are God-given through our obedience to and faith in Him?*