

EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY FOUR

A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

As the saying goes, “You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.” Today we meet Elijah whose bow was broken. His depression happened suddenly, unexpectedly. But when Elijah finally stopped looking down and around and within, and finally looked up, it was an epochal event. And he never slumped again.

—Charles R. Swindoll

KING Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, led Israel into more sin than any other king and queen before them. They worshiped Baal, the Canaanite false god of thunder and rain, and built a temple to him in Samaria (1 Kings 16:29–33). Because of their sin, the Lord brought drought to the land (17:1). But He also wanted His people to repent and worship Him, so He planned a showdown between His man Elijah and 450 prophets of Baal.

The false prophets prepared a sacrifice, and from morning until evening, they called upon Baal to send fire to devour it. But the heavens remained silent until Elijah prayed, and, immediately, the Lord sent fire that consumed not only Elijah’s sacrifice but the firewood and stone altar as well.

When the people saw the blinding flash, “they fell face down on the ground and cried out, ‘The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!’” (18:39). Elijah prayed again, and the true God of creation opened the heavens and poured down rain, breaking the three-year drought (18:41–45).

It was a magnificent triumph! Fire and rain from heaven displayed God’s awesome greatness and grace. Unfortunately, this was a single victory in a spiritual war that continued within the soul of a person nobody would have expected. After Mount Carmel, the godly Elijah battled a deep depression that almost took his life.

Let’s follow Elijah into his desert of discouragement and learn the lessons from *the prophet’s crash and God’s rescue* to help us win the fight with our own devil: Despair.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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1 Kings 19



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, take a quiet moment to meditate on the following assurances of God's presence in your dark times. Highlight the phrases that give you the most comfort and invite the Lord into your time of study.

*Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me. (Psalm 23:4)*

*Don't be afraid, for I am with you.
Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you.
I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

*"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you." (43:1-2)*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Observation is the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. As you read 1 Kings 19, look closely at the dialogue between the four main characters and the description of the action. Step into the scenes as if you were present: walk with the people, observe the landscape, feel the atmosphere, and sense the intensity of each moment.



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Observation: Elijah's Retreat

First Kings 18 closes with heavenly raindrops refreshing the land and cleansing the nation's sin. First Kings 19 opens with Ahab, still drenched from God's rainstorm, running to his wife like a spoiled child running to his mother.

Weak-Willed Ahab and Wicked Jezebel

Ahab purposefully slanted his report of the events on Mount Carmel to ignite Jezebel's rage. What did Ahab say, and did he omit any details (*1 Kings 19:1*)?

Baal may have been silent . . . but Jezebel *thundered* her threat to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you" (19:2). How did Elijah respond to the roar of Jezebel's rage? He bolted!

Have you ever had your life threatened? Strange things happen to your mind when you're threatened and know you're being stalked. The attacker's gun is loaded or his knife is sharpened, and any shadow may conceal the person who is out to get you. Fear does something to you, even if you are an Elijah. —Chuck Swindoll

Elijah Discouraged

Knowing Jezebel's threat had teeth—she had tried to kill all the prophets in the past (1 Kings 18:4)—Elijah became "afraid and fled for his life" (19:3). Seeking safety from danger is a wise move, but Elijah let his fear take control. Let's observe the fault lines that weakened Elijah's faith so we can learn from his example and better prepare for attacks that come our way.

Read *1 Kings 19:3–4*, and write down your observations about Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's threat.



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In his message, Chuck Swindoll notes five characteristics of Elijah's actions that are common among those who struggle with depression.

1. *Elijah wasn't thinking realistically or clearly.* Elijah, who once urged others to not be afraid (1 Kings 17:13), allowed fearful thoughts to run loose in his mind.
2. *Elijah separated himself from strengthening relationships.* Elijah fled to Beersheba, about a hundred miles south of Jezreel. Depressed people often isolate themselves when they feel vulnerable.
3. *Elijah was caught in the backwash of a great victory.* Depression frequently comes on the heels of a great triumph.
4. *Elijah gave in to the beast of self-pity.* Elijah's plea for God to take his life flowed out of a false sense of failure: "I am no better than my ancestors who have already died" (19:4).
5. *Elijah was physically exhausted and emotionally spent.* Elijah's ministry had been full-speed ahead without a break. Finally, alone under the broom tree, Elijah slept for the first time in perhaps weeks (19:5).

Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah were the first three characters in this drama. The Lord took center stage as He came to Elijah not with a lecture but with loving compassion.



Interpretation: Elijah's Restoration

Let's focus on interpretation as we step into the next section of the narrative. What can we learn about God from His tender response to Elijah?

Compassionate Lord

The Lord's initial response to His discouraged prophet was to give him *time to rest and refresh*. What did God do, and what can we infer about God's nature from His actions (1 Kings 19:5–8)?



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Next, how did God correct Elijah's negative thinking by *communicating wisely* (*1 Kings 19:9–13*)?

What does God's display from nature mean? Wind, earthquakes, and fire were all associated with the Lord's power and often His judgment (*Judges 5:4–5; Psalm 18:7–15; Isaiah 64:1–4*). This was especially true on Mount Sinai, the mountain covered in smoke and fire when Moses received the law (*Exodus 19:18*).

Elijah probably assumed God brought him to a place of suffering for judgment. What reassuring message did God wisely communicate about His nature by coming to Elijah in the sound of a "gentle whisper" (*1 Kings 19:12*)?

So, God gave Elijah rest and refreshment and wisdom. But Elijah needed one more boost to get out of his pit of depression. What did God do for Elijah next (*19:14–21*)?



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All ended well as Elijah and Elisha exited the scene shouldering the ministry together. Elijah found his needed rest, companionship, and communion with the Lord. He learned that God was still in charge, not Ahab or Jezebel, and that the outcome of God's plan for Israel did not all depend on him.



Correlation: God's Heart for the Downtrodden

God came to discouraged Elijah in a gentle whisper. His compassion came again to the world in the gentle Savior. Read the following verses, and write down the ways that Jesus expressed the heart of God to hurting people.

Matthew 9:35–36

Luke 7:11–15



Application: Lessons Learned

The same God who came to Elijah with a tender touch in the prophet's darkest hour can come to you as well. Can you see any similarities between your experiences and Elijah's? Have you followed in Elijah's stressed-out steps? What happened, and how can you bring balance back to your life?



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Have you withdrawn lately into a wilderness of isolation? Have depressing thoughts been feeding your loneliness? What is God speaking to you in this lonesome place? Recall the verses in the Preparing Your Heart section at the beginning of our study.

How do you see God? As a purging fire? A quaking mountain of judgment? A terrifying wind of rebuke? Thinking about Elijah's story, how can you experience the God who seeks to whisper gently to you in the quietness of your ordinary day?

Do you tend to set unrealistically high expectations for yourself? Despite the triumph on Mount Carmel, Elijah was convinced he was a failure because Ahab and Jezebel didn't change. Do you blame yourself because others won't change? Do you have a supportive friend who can help you rest in God's plan when circumstances don't turn out as you hoped? Who can walk with you through your dark times of self-doubt?

The next time fear comes knocking, remember to turn first to the Lord. He won't tear you apart with wind, earthquakes, and fire; He'll draw you to Himself in quietness, gentleness, and care. He is more powerful than any thundering Jezebel, and He has a plan that's bigger than your circumstances.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, our enemy, the Adversary, prowls like a lion looking to devour me. He knows when I'm vulnerable. He sends enemies to terrify me. Lord, I need Your help. Help my thoughts not to run wild with fearful imaginations. Remind me of what is true—Your faithful presence and sovereign control. Come to my rescue, just as You came to Elijah's aid. I need You, Lord. I need You every hour! Amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

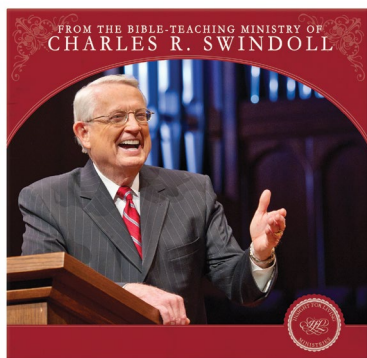
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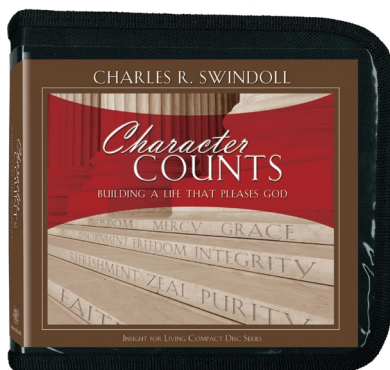
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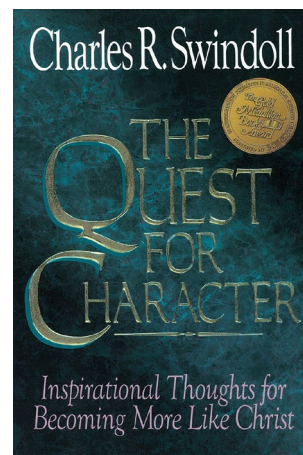
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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