

Explore the Bible: July 17

Hope • 1 Kings 19:9-18

By Emily Beth Crews



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The prophet Elijah was commissioned with being a “Reformer of Israel” (Matthew Henry), but even after the triumph over the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, where God was proven to be the one true God, he was downtrodden. “Great faith is not always alike strong” (Henry).

King Ahab recounted to his Baal-worshipping wife, Queen Jezebel, what Elijah (not God) had accomplished at Mt. Carmel, detailing the later executions of the prophets of Baal. Jezebel was furious and swore to kill Elijah. Her threats of death sent Elijah running for his life into the wilderness of Beer Sheba.

Matthew Henry comments, “Elijah was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel.” While there, he sat under a shrub and prayed desperately for the Lord to end his life. He fell asleep and was visited by an angel of the Lord who provided sustenance and encouragement.

Elijah ate, drank, and slept. Then the angel visited him again and urged him to get on his journey to Mount Horeb. The journey would take him 40 days and nights.

Alone? (1 Kings 19:9-10). Once Elijah arrived at Horeb, he retreated into a cave. Some commentators believe this is the same cave where the Lord was revealed to Moses (Exodus 33:22). In Elijah's banishment, the Lord met with him and asked, "Why are you here, Elijah?" (v.9). Psalm 139:7 reminds us, "Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee to escape your presence?" (NET).

The prophet immediately answered the Lord (we do not read of any prostrating before the Lord) and offers his compliance. He tells the Lord he has been unwaveringly loyal to the Him unlike the Israelites, the ones he was sent to reform toward wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

Elijah laments, "I alone am left and now they want to take my life" (v.10).

He was without purpose and safety. Matthew Henry paraphrases verse 10, "I have none to support me... and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude than lose my life in a fruitless endeavor to reform those that hate to be reformed."

The Whisper (1 Kings 19:11-14). The Lord told Elijah to go outside the cave, stand on the mountain, and look for Him to pass by. The Lord sent powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire, but the Lord was in none of them.

Instead, there was a "soft whisper" and Elijah "heard it," causing him to "cover his face with his robe" (vv.12-13). "The wind, earthquake, and fire did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord than by His terrors" (Henry).

God asked Elijah again, "Why are you here?" (v.13). Elijah replied the same as he did in verse ten, lamenting Israel's lack of wholehearted devotion for the Lord and his own loneliness. Elijah's response to the Lord is a reminder for us all that we can take our lament, discouragement, and loneliness to the Lord. He has a kind ear inclined towards us

(Psalm 34:18; 116:2).

Reality Defined (1 Kings 19:15-18). The Lord commissioned Elijah with a three-fold mission – anointing Hazael king of Syria, Jehu king over Israel, Elisha to take his place as prophet over Israel.

For Elijah to fulfill these new duties, he would have to return the way he came, facing his fears and potential death by Jezebel. The Lord also gave Elijah a picture of what was to come – destruction and death.

“The prophet who thought he was doomed would initiate the final steps toward Ahab and Jezebel’s destruction – and the end of Baal worship in Samaria. While the ultimate result would not happen until he was in heaven, his work after leaving Horeb would affect Israel for years to come” (Lifeway).

Lastly, the Lord encouraged Elijah. “I still have left in Israel 7,000 followers who have not bowed their knees to Baal or kissed the images of him” (v.18; Romans 11:4). “In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostasy, God has always had and will have a remnant faithful to Him, some that keep their integrity and do not go down the stream” (Henry).

Elijah was not alone. In a whole nation, there were 7,000 people who remained faithful to the Lord. Despite Elijah’s feelings of being the only one committed to the Lord, “God’s faithful ones are often his hidden ones (Psalm 83:3), and the visible church is scarcely visible, the wheat lost in the chaff and the gold in the dross, till the sifting, refining, separating day comes” (Henry).

Emily Beth Crews currently resides in Montana but was born and raised in Mississippi. She is the daughter of regular contributor, Laura Lee Leathers.