

Survey of the Bible part 18

The last time we were together Elijah had just outrun Ahab to Jezreel which is about a 25 mile run, and Ahab was in a chariot. And all of this was after the showdown between Elijah and the priests of Baal where Elijah had killed all of these priests. And this is where we pick up.

1 Kings 19:1-4 ^{NAU} Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then 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." ³ And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴ But 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."

If you look at the faith of Elijah prior to this and the conquests he partook in, as the Lord was with him, why do you suppose he reaches a point where he is no longer willing to serve in this capacity of the Lord's instrument of judgment?

It's one thing to serve God in a warm and fuzzy atmosphere where everyone loves you and hangs on your every word, it's an entirely different ball game when the only thing you seem to experience is strife and discord in your ministry.

I can tell you first hand that the latter exhausts you and it doesn't make for the kind of environment where you want more. And though Elijah may have been physically exhausted from his recent run, it was much more than that that caused him to want to lay down and die.

But notice how Elijah approaches this. It wasn't as though he was willing to commit suicide. That's not the issue. He is simply asking the One who charged him with his original ministry of judgment if he can now be relieved of his duty.

1 Kings 19:4 ⁴ But 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."

He is simply asking God that He would bring his ministry to a close and take him home so that the burden of this ministry would be over. He surmises that unless he is taken home to be with the Lord that his ministry of judgment will continue and the strife will continue and the fleeing from his enemies will continue and he doesn't seem willing to continue in that vein.

What I find interesting is the way the Lord answers his prayer. You would think that the Lord would send a booming message from heaven and encourage Elijah that though he walk through the valley of the shadow of death that God would be with him, or as in the case of Paul the Lord would remind him that His grace was sufficient for any problem he was experiencing.

But that's not what God does.

1 Kings 19:5-8 ⁵ He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." ⁶ Then 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. ⁷ The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." ⁸ So 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.

What kind of answer is this when Elijah was asking that God might take his life?

God's answer to Elijah's prayer that God might take his life was, no. But when God answers no it doesn't mean that God leaves us on our own. God did answer Elijah's prayer the same way He answered Paul's prayer.

And the answer was that no matter where you are and no matter what circumstance you're in, I will be there and I will provide for you.

Now in this case how does God meet Elijah's spiritual needs?

By meeting his immediate physical needs. Sleep and food.

Sometimes we approach God with a spiritual need thinking that we will get a special touch from Him or a special word from Him, or maybe God will send us a sign regarding our situation to ease our minds.

And when we don't seem to get that special touch or word or sign we assume that God didn't answer our prayer when in fact He has answered but in a way that we may not immediately recognize.

No matter how He answers the important thing to know is that God is not indifferent toward His people. He just doesn't blow us off and have us fend for ourselves. He always provides the answer. Unfortunately, when we don't get the answer we're looking for we think that He has not answered.

In those times we need to be willing to look for the answer in another place, and where do you think that place is?

His written word.

Just because we don't get an answer booming from heaven it doesn't mean that the Creator hasn't spoken to us. For example, the woman with an issue of blood whom Jesus miraculously healed is often viewed as God's personal intervention because she believed and her answer was immediate.

Mark 5:24-34 ²⁴ And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. ²⁵ A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, ²⁶ and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse-- ²⁷ after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind *Him* and touched His cloak. ²⁸ For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well." ²⁹ Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power *proceeding* from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" ³¹ And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" ³² And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. ³⁴ And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."

Was this woman immediately healed?

The answer is probably yes and no. We assume that this woman had never begged God to heal her before this time. And, by the

way, when the word of God speaks of her as having a hemorrhage for twelve years that is no small thing. We don't know what caused her hemorrhage but we do know what this kind of hemorrhage could be.

It could be a vaginal hemorrhage which indicates problems with her female parts or a urinary hemorrhage which indicates problems with her kidneys, ureters or bladder. In either case when you are constantly bleeding your body is always in pain and you are always weak.

To assume that she never approached God with this problem would assume that a Jew knew nothing of how God can heal. Now, it is certainly possible that she thought God could heal her through the agency of the doctors of the time but that's not how it happened. In fact, we're told that she grew worse.

This doesn't mean that doctors can't be used of God. We know that Luke himself was a physician and that Paul encouraged Timothy to use a home remedy of wine and water to ease his stomach problems, probably caused by his congregation.

So, the question needs to be raised in regards to this woman. Had God not answered her prayers for all of those 12 years?

Absolutely not. He had most certainly had. And the answer was no, not yet.

And from what we now know, according to His word, why did He not answer yes during those previous 12 years?

So, that Christ might be glorified through His ministry of healing during that time. Again, keep in mind that no matter what God is doing or not doing in our lives at any given time, the ultimate way in which He works is for His glorification through our lives.

Was God glorified through the healing of that woman?

Was God less than interested in that woman during the previous 12 years?

God has a plan for everyone.

Romans 9:17 ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE

MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

Whether Pharaoh or this woman or you or me, God has raised us up and put us on this planet so that He might demonstrate His power and that His name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. Not unlike how the heavens declare the glory of God.

So, getting back to Elijah. His prayer was not answered in the way he thought. God did not take his life and bring him home. Instead, God has more work for Elijah. But God knows how the body works, after all He created it.

And so, what does God do for Elijah?

1 Kings 19:5-6 ⁵ He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." ⁶ Then 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.

Now, we're not told how long Elijah slept under that juniper tree, but I think it's safe to assume that God allowed Elijah to get a good long sleep. But sleep alone is not sufficient for strength.

1 Kings 19:7 ⁷ The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you."

By the way, I find it interesting that angels can touch. What do I mean by that?

If you're a spirit touching becomes a problem because it's assumed that touching involves physical contact. And we assume that angels are spirits because of passages like **Hebrews 1:13-14** ¹³ But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

But does being a spirit mean that there is no aspect of being physical?

Let me ask you this. Can you see the wind?

Can the wind touch you?

What is the wind made of?

It's made up of physical elements like hydrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and many other invisible gases. But when you take those invisible gases and combine them in certain ways, for example, two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen, what do you get?

Water. Is water invisible when lots of these H₂O elements combine?

No. When you touch water it touches back. It's wet, or it's cold and hard. But it is quite physical. So, simply because invisible gases like hydrogen or oxygen have not combined to form water does that make those gases any less physical?

Only from our perspective.

So, if that which is invisible is physical is it possible that angels, who are invisible, are in fact physical?

Well, we know they appear physical because on several occasions in the word of God they can touch, they can eat and drink and they can communicate as they stand face to face with people. And apparently they can cook.

1 Kings 19:6 ⁶ Then 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.

This is the first ever mention of angel food cake and this angel may have borrowed a recipe from angel's food in heaven.

Psalm 78:24-25 ²⁴ He rained down manna upon them to eat And gave them food from heaven. ²⁵ Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in abundance.

But I digress. Back to Elijah.

God did answer Elijah's prayer with the specific purpose of going to another location to accomplish specific tasks for God.

1 Kings 19:8-21 ⁸ So 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. ⁹ Then 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?" ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ So 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. ¹² After the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. ¹³ When 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?" ¹⁴ Then 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." ¹⁵ The 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; ¹⁶ and 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. ¹⁷ "It 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. ¹⁸ "Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." ¹⁹ So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs *of oxen* before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" ²¹ So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave *it* to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.

What I find interesting in verse 8 is what it does not say. See if you can spot it.

“So 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.”

When we talk about the strength in which we serve God, what kind of strength is it, typically?

The strength of the Lord.

So, is the strength that Elijah possesses to accomplish God's task simply physical strength found in the food he ate?

Absolutely not. But it does show us that God does not discount that our physical bodies work a certain way and He is willing and able to meet all of our needs to accomplish His will.

Again, let me ask you. Have you ever snapped at someone you love because you were hungry and tired?

Now, granted it's probably not a good excuse to snap at someone you love, but the reality is it can contribute to our sinful disposition to do such things.

But in God's strength, which supplies both our physical and spiritual strength, we can accomplish God's will. And this is precisely what Elijah does. But it should also be noted that no one meal can give strength for 40 days which gives a pretty clear indication that Elijah's strength was not simply physical but most certainly spiritual to accomplish God's task.

He travels to Horeb and lodges in a cave waiting instructions from God and next time we'll look at his lodging place and what God does to prepare Elijah for his next task.