

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL PROPHETS AND KINGS GOD THE REVEALER *THE GOD WHO WHISPERS*

A prophet in the Old Testament was someone who was used by God to communicate His message to the world. Prophets were also called “seers” because they could “see,” spiritually speaking, as God gave them insight. A prophet sometimes had a unique appearance. Elijah who we will study again today was known for wearing “a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist” (**2 Kings 1:8**). After John the Apostle recorded the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the complete Word of God came together in 66 books making one holy book. Whenever a person claims to be speaking for God today (the essence of prophecy), those words must agree with what the Bible says. Modern ‘prophets’ must be in 100% complete agreement with what God has already said in the Bible. Otherwise, we will recognize them for what they are – false prophets. God does not contradict Himself. **1 John 4:1 (ESV)** ¹ *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Elijah was a true prophet of God and even he became discouraged. From his life, we learn that: (1) we are never closer to defeat than in moments of greatest victory; (2) we are never as alone as we may feel; and (3) God speaks more often in persistent whispers than in shouts!

In the first lesson of this unit, God revealed Himself through Elijah to a large group of people in a bold and spectacular way. This would be Elijah’s greatest victory. In today’s lesson, God revealed Himself to just Elijah alone in a still small voice – it was a simple whisper. He heard the that whisper in the midst of his fear and exhaustion.

For a moment, Elijah had a ‘mountaintop experience’ as God answered his prayer for fire to come from heaven to light the water soaked altar on Mt. Carmel after the false prophets had unsuccessfully begged Baal all day to light the fire of their altar. After the fire from heaven lit the altar, the Israelites had proclaimed *the LORD He is God*. Then, we read in **1 Kings 18:40 (ESV)** ⁴⁰ *And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.* As most of us discover sooner or later ‘mountaintop’ experiences are fleeting. Obviously, carrying out the Lord’s command of putting the prophets of Baal to death was not something that brought rejoicing to the heart of Elijah but it had to be done. After this, the rains came to a drought ravaged land as Elijah had promised. But, not everyone was as happy as you might expect! The God who whispers strengthens us in our despair.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-4 (ESV) ¹ *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 more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”* ³ *Then he was afraid, and he 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 broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

When the rain began to fall, Jezebel who was in Jezreel and unaware of the happenings on Mt. Carmel, may have thought that her god Baal had triumphed and brought the rain. However, when Ahab arrived home, he told her the truth that Yahweh was victor in the fire lighting contest. Both she and her husband failed to accept the clear evidence that Yahweh was God and Baal was not. Instead of repenting and calling the nation back to serving the LORD, Jezebel chose to 'put the fear' into God's servant and Ahab allowed her to do it. Besides being thoroughly evil, Jezebel was shrewd. Instead of sending her men to immediately kill Elijah which would turn him into a martyr, she determined sending a 'death threat' message would cause him to run. And her message had its desired effect upon Elijah – he turned and ran. He gave into his fear. We are never closer to defeat than in moments of greatest victory. *Psalm 27:1 (ESV)* ¹ *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

Elijah had lived fearlessly for three years doing the LORD's work. Why did he run? Elijah became a prime candidate for fear and depression because he was physically tired, emotionally exhausted and someone had threatened his life. It is likely that Elijah had hoped that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel would see the mighty display of the powerful hand of God, repent and turn from their wicked ways but when this did not happen, it was discouraging.

It is interesting that Elijah went to Judah where the daughter of Ahab was the King of Judah's wife. Elijah in a weak moment lost sight of the truth that the safest place to be is in the will of God. Wiersbe comments, "When God's servants get out of God's will, they're liable to do all sorts of foolish things and fail in their strongest points." If it can happen to one of the LORD's greatest servants like Elijah, it can happen to you or me.

Elijah **ran on foot** from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel (17 miles) and then from Jezreel to Beersheba (100 miles). A marathon as we know it today is 26 miles. It is amazing what adrenalin can allow a human to do. Elijah left his servant at Beersheba – possibly for the servant's protection.

Read 1 Kings 19:5-9a (ESV) ⁵ *And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat."* ⁶ *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.* ⁷ *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."* ⁸ *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.* ^{9a} *And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

The KJV and the NASB translate the broom tree as being a juniper. The broom or juniper tree is actually a flowering shrub that flourishes in the wilderness and provides shade. Sleeping too much is frequently a symptom of depression. At this point in Elijah's desperate journey, undoubtedly Elijah's need for sleep came

from all that physical exertion. One author I read said that Elijah was in the midst of spiritual warfare. And, it is often said that discouragement is one of Satan's best tools.

There are many reasons for depression – the lost of a loved one, illness, financial troubles. For some the changing of the seasons bring depression and some have physical chemical imbalances that need medication. We must always remember that the Great Physician often works through the medical profession. As part of the family of God, we should be quick to provide encouragement to those who are in times of depression being careful not to throw out empty advice like “you need to buck up and get over it.”

In our work for the LORD, we need to be on guard against Satan's tools. When he can't bring us down with drug addiction, adultery, stealing, etc., he may use something as simple as causing us to feel sorry for our self for the sole purpose of getting us off our mission.

As we have studied before, pre-incarnate visits of Jesus (theophanies), are often found in the Old Testament. These visits are by someone described as the Angel of the Lord. It is interesting that the One who would be the Bread of Life and the Living Water in the New Testament brought bread and water to Elijah in the Old Testament!

The Lord knew that Elijah planned to visit Mount Sinai, the place with Moses received the Ten Commandments. Sinai was located about 250 miles from Beersheba, and he would need strength for the journey. *Psalm 23:5 (ESV)*⁵ *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...* Elijah obeyed the Angel of the LORD and was able to travel for forty days and nights on the nourishment from those two meals. It took Elijah 40 days and 40 nights to get to the place where Moses had spent 40 days and 40 nights on two separate occasions. The number 40 in scripture generally symbolizes a period of testing.

The God who whispers challenges our wrong assumptions.

Read 1 Kings 19:9b-10 (ESV)^{9b} *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 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.”*

What are you doing here, Elijah? When we become discouraged, we have a tendency to mix accuracy with self-pity. Elijah had been passionate for God until his message from the LORD was rejected. In his self-pity, Elijah allowed himself to conclude that he was the only servant of God left. He thought he was alone and he was wrong. We are never alone as we may feel! In fact, God's presence was the one constant in Elijah's life.

Read 1 Kings 19:11-14 (ESV)¹¹ *And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke 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 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ 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.”

This time God was not in the wind although God had spoken to Job out of the whirlwind. This time God was not in the earthquake although God had been in the earthquake before the giving of the Ten Commandments. This time God was not in the fire although God had just been in the fire on Mt. Carmel. Elijah’s ministry had been a ministry of miracles. He had shut the heavens and had been sustained by ravens. He had raised the dead and called down fire from heaven and brought rain to a dry parched land. And now, God chose to reveal His glory to Elijah so like He often does to us – in a still small voice. God’s real work in the world is not often accomplished by dramatic methods. Instead, we find God in the transformation of human lives when we acknowledge the whispers of Jesus that speak to our hearts.

I like to speak of hearing something from the Lord more than once as being a ‘sacred echo’. Listen to the sacred echo Elijah heard: *What are you doing here, Elijah?*” Don’t we hear those same echoes when we step away from our work for the Lord? God speaks more often in persistent whispers than in shouts! The God who whispers reveals Himself through His faithful people.

Read 1 Kings 19:15-18 (ESV) ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.”

Elijah was told to anoint two new kings – Hazael over Syria and Jehu over Israel reminding us in this election year how the hand of God is in control of leaders in **all nations**. Another assignment for Elijah was to appoint his own successor – Elisha. The people the Lord named were not especially significant in the social structure of that day but by the time Elisha and Jehu completed their work, Baal worship was almost wiped out in Israel.

Even though Elijah felt he was all alone, the LORD said: *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.* We too can be encouraged by the LORD’s words to Elijah. No matter how wicked our world appears to us, God always has a remnant of people who are faithful to Him.

What did Elijah do after this encounter with God? He retraced his steps and went back to his place of service!