

CHAPTER 19

We left Elijah at the entrance of Jezreel, still appearing publicly, and all the people's eyes upon him. In this chapter we have him again absconding, and driven into obscurity, at a time when he could ill be spared; but we are to look upon it as a punishment to Israel for the insincerity and inconstancy of their reformation. When people will not learn it is just with God to remove their teachers into corners. Now observe,

- I.** How he was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel his sworn enemy (v. 1-3).
- II.** How he was met, in his banishment, by the favour of God, his covenant-friend.
 - 1.** How God fed him (v. 4-8).
 - 2.** How he conversed with him, and manifested himself to him (v. 9, 11-13), heard his complaint (v. 10-14), directed him what to do (v. 15-17), and encouraged him (v. 18).
- III.** How his hands were strengthened, at his return out of banishment, by the joining of Elisha with him (v. 19-21).

<190> 1 KINGS 19:1-8

ELIJAH'S FLIGHT FROM JEZEBEL

One would have expected, after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God and such a clear decision of the controversy depending between him and Baal, to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people — after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them, the one as it signified the acceptance of their offering, the other as it *refreshed their inheritance, which was weary* — that now they would all, as one man, return to the worship of the God of Israel and take Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he would thenceforward be prime-minister of state, and his directions would be as laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise; he is neglected whom God honoured; no respect is paid to him, nor care taken of him, nor any use made of him,

but, on the contrary, the land of Israel, to which he had been, and might have been, so great a blessing, is now made too hot for him.

1. Ahab incensed Jezebel against him. That queen-consort, it seems, was in effect queen-regent, as she was afterwards when she was queen-dowager, an imperious woman that managed king and kingdom and did what she would. Ahab's conscience would not let him persecute Elijah (some remains he had in him of the blood and spirit of an Israelite, which tied his hands), but he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done (v. 1), not to convince, but to exasperate her. It is not said he told her what *God* had done, but what *Elijah* had done, as if he, by some spell or charm, had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it. Especially he represented to her, as that which would make her outrageous against him, that he had slain the prophets; the prophets of Baal he calls *the prophets*, as if none but they were worthy of the name. His heart was set upon them, and he aggravated the slaying of them as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal upon Jezebel for killing God's prophets, ^{<11804>}1 Kings 18:4. Those who, when they cannot for shame or fear do mischief themselves, yet stir up others to do it, will have it laid to their charge as if they had themselves done it.

2. Jezebel sent him a threatening message (v. 2), that she had vowed and sworn to be the death of him within twenty-four hours. Something prevents her from doing it just now, but she resolves it shall not be long undone. Note, Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God by that which should convince and conquer them and bring them into subjection to him. She swears by her gods, and, raging like one distracted, curseth herself if she slay not him, without any proviso of a divine permission. Cruelty and confidence often meet in persecutors. *I will pursue, I will overtake,* ^{<12159>}Exodus 15:9. But how came she to send him word of her design, and so to give him an opportunity of making his escape? Did she think him so daring that he would not flee, or herself so formidable that she could prevent him? Or was there a special providence in it, that she should be thus infatuated by her own fury? I am apt to think that though she desired nothing more than his blood, yet, at this time, she durst not meddle with him *for fear of the people, all counting him a prophet*, a great prophet, and therefore sent this message to him merely to frighten him and get him out of the way. for the present, that he might not carry on what he had begun. The backing of her threats with an oath and imprecation does not at all prove that she really intended to slay him, but only that she

intended to make him believe so. The gods she swore by could do her no harm.

3. Elijah, hereupon, in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba, v. 3. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab and all the prophets of Baal? Nay, which kept him by his sacrifice when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman. *Lord, what is man!* Great faith is not always alike strong. He could not but know that he might be very serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all the reason in the world to depend upon God's protection while he was doing God's work; yet he fled. In his former danger God had bidden him hide himself (^{<117B>}1 Kings 17:3), therefore he supposed he might do so now.

4. From Beer-sheba he went forward into the wilderness, that vast howling wilderness in which the Israelites wandered. Beer-sheba was so far distant from Jezreel, and within the dominion of so good a king as Jehoshaphat, that he could not but be safe there; yet, as if his fears haunted him even when he was out of the reach of danger, he could not rest there, but went a day's journey into the desert. Yet perhaps he retired thither not so much for his safety as that he might be wholly retired from the world, in order to a more free and intimate communion with God. *He left his servant at Beer-sheba* that he might be private in the wilderness, as Abraham left his servants at the bottom of the hill when he went up into the mount to worship God, and as Christ in the garden was *withdrawn from his disciples*, or perhaps it was because he would not expose his servant, who was young and tender, to the hardships of the wilderness, which would have been putting new wine into old bottles. We ought thus to consider the frame of those who are under our charge, for God considers ours.

5. Being wearied with his journey, he grew cross (like children when they are sleepy) and *wished he might die*, v. 4. He *requested for his life* (so it is ion the margin), *that he might die*; for death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet that was not the reason why he wished to die; it was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to *depart and be with Christ*, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. Those that are, in this manner, forward to die are not in the fittest frame for dying. Jezebel has sworn his death, and therefore he, in a fret, prays for it,

runs from death to death, yet with this difference, he wishes to die by the hand of the Lord, whose tender mercies are great, and not to fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He would rather die in the wilderness than as Baal's prophet died, according to Jezebel's threatening (v. 2), lest the worshippers of Baal should triumph and blaspheme the God of Israel, whom they will think themselves too hard for, if they can run down his advocate. He pleads, "It is enough. I have done enough, and suffered enough. I am weary of living." Those that have secured a happiness in the other world will soon have enough of this world. He pleads, "*I am not better than my fathers*, not better able to bear those fatigues, and therefore why should I be longer burdened with them than they were?" But is this *that my lord Elijah*? Can that great and gallant spirit shrink thus? God thus left him to himself, to show that when he was bold and strong it was *in the Lord and the power of his might*, but of himself he was *no better than his fathers* or brethren.

6. God, by an angel, fed him in that wilderness, into the wants and perils of which he had wilfully thrown himself, and in which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he would have perished. How much better does God deal with his froward children than they deserve! Elijah, in a pet, wished to die; God needed him not, yet he designed further to employ and honour him, and therefore sent an angel to *keep him alive*. Our case would be bad sometimes if God should take us at our word and grant us our foolish passionate requests. Having prayed that he might die, he *laid down and slept* (v. 5), wishing it may be to die in his sleep, and not to awake again; but he is awakened out of his sleep, and finds himself not only well provided for with bread and water (v. 6), but, which was more, attended by an angle, who guarded him when he slept, and twice called him to his food when it was ready for him, v. 5, 7. He needed not to complain of the unkindness of men when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Thus provided for, he had reason to think he had fared better than the *prophets of the groves*, that *did eat at Jezebel's table*. Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not lost them; there they may *look at him that lives and sees them, as Hagar*, ⁰¹⁶³Genesis 16:13.

7. He was carried, in the strength of this meat, to Horeb, *the mount of God*, v. 8. Thither the Spirit of the Lord led him, probably beyond his own intention, that he might have communion with God in the same place

where Moses had, the law that was given by Moses being revived by him. The angel bade him eat the second time, because of the greatness of *the journey* that was *before him*, v. 7. Note God knows what he designs us for, though we do not, what service, what trials, and will take care for us when we, for want of foresight, cannot for ourselves, that we be furnished for them with *grace sufficient*. He that appoints what the voyage shall be will victual the ship accordingly. See how many different ways God took to keep Elijah alive; he fed him by ravens, with multiplied meals — then by an angel — and now, to show that *man lives not by bread alone*, he kept him alive forty days without meat, not resting and sleeping, which might make him the less to crave sustenance, but continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings; yet he neither needs food nor desires it. The place, no doubt, reminds him of the manna, and encourages him to hope that God will sustain him here, and in due time bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like him, fretful and distrustful.

<118>1 KINGS 19:9-18

ELIJAH'S CONVERSE WITH GOD

Here is,

I. Elijah housed in a cave at Mount Horeb, which is called *the mount of God*, because on it God had formerly manifested his glory. And perhaps this was the same cave, or cleft of a rock, in which Moses was hidden when the Lord *passed by before him and proclaimed his name*, <132> Exodus 33:22. What Elijah proposed to himself in coming to lodge here, I cannot conceive, unless it was to indulge his melancholy, or to satisfy his curiosity and assist his faith and devotion with the sight of that famous place where the law was given and where so many great things were done, and hoping to meet with God himself there, where Moses met with him, or in token of his abandoning his people Israel, who hated to be reformed (in the latter case, it agrees with Jeremiah's wish, <119> Jeremiah 9:2, *O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them, for they are all adulterers*) and so it was a bad omen of God's forsaking them; or it was because the thought he could not be safe any where else, and to this instance of the hardships this good man

was reduced to the apostle refers, ^{<8113>}Hebrews 11:38. *They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

II. The visit God paid to him there and the enquiry he made concerning him: *The word of the Lord came to him.* We cannot go any where to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. *Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?* ^{<8107>}Psalm 139:7, etc. God will take care of his out-casts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses. John saw the visions of the Almighty when he was in banishment in the isle of Patmos, ^{<8109>}Revelation 1:9. The question God puts to the prophet it, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* v. 9, and again v. 13. This is a reproof,

1. For his fleeing hither. “What brings thee so far from home? Dost thou flee from Jezebel? Couldst thou not depend upon almighty power for thy protection?” Lay the emphasis upon the pronoun *thou*. “What *thou!* So great a man, so great a prophet, so famed for resolution — dost thou flee thy country, forsake thy colours thus?” This cowardice would have been more excusable in another, and not so bad an example. *Should such a man as I flee?* ^{<8101>}Nehemiah 6:11. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be thus shaken.*

2. For his fixing here. “What doest thou here, in this cave? Is this a place for a prophet of the Lord to lodge in? Is this a time for such men to retreat, when the public has such need of them?” In the retirement to which God sent Elijah (1 Kings 17) he was a blessing to a poor widow at Sarepta, but here he had no opportunity of doing good. Note, It concerns us often to enquire whether we be in our place and in the way of our duty. “Am I where I should be, whither God calls me, where my business lies, and where I may be useful?”

III. The account he gives of himself, in answer to the question put to him (v. 10), and repeated, in answer to the same question, v. 14.

1. He excuses his retreat, and desires it may not be imputed to his want of zeal for reformation, but to his despair of success. For God knew, and his own conscience witnessed for him, that as long as there was any hope of doing good he had been *very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts*; but now that he had *laboured in vain*, and all his endeavours were to no purpose, he thought it was time to give up the cause, and mourn for what he could not mend. *Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei* — “Away to thy cell, and cry, *Have compassion on me.*”

2. He complains of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety to which they had arrived: “*The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, and that is the reason I have forsaken them; who can stay among them, to see every thing that is sacred ruined and run down?*” This the apostle calls his *making intercession against Israel*, ^{<510>}Romans 11:2, 3. He had often been, of choice, their advocate, but now he is necessitated to be their accuser, before God. Thus ^{<185>}John 5:45, *There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, whom you trust.* Those are truly miserable that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them.

(1.) He charges them with having forsaken God's covenant; though they retained circumcision, that sign and seal of it, yet they had quitted his worship and service, which was the intention of it. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and let fall their communion with him, do really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him.

(2.) With having *thrown down his altars*, not only deserted them and suffered them to go to decay, but, in their zeal for the worship of Baal, wilfully demolished them. This alludes to the private altars which the prophets of the Lord had, and which good people attended, who could not go up to Jerusalem and would not worship the calves nor Baal. These separate altars, though breaking in upon the unity of the church, yet, being erected and attended by those that sincerely aimed at the glory of God and served him faithfully, the seeming schism was excused. God owned them for his altars, as well as that at Jerusalem, and the putting of them down is charged upon Israel as a crying sin. But this was not all.

(3.) *They have slain thy prophets with the sword*, who, it is probable, ministered at those altars. Jezebel, a foreigner, slew them (^{<1180>}1 Kings 18:4), but the crime is charged upon the body of the people because the generality of them were *consenting to their death*, and pleased with it.

3. He gives the reasons why he retired into this desert and took up his residence in this cave.

(1.) It was because he could not appear to any purpose: “*I only am left, and have none to second or support me in any good design. They all said, The Lord he is God, but none of them would stand by me nor offer to shelter me. That point then gained was presently lost again, and Jezebel can do more to debauch them than I can to reform them. What can one do against thousands?*” Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. No

one is willing to venture alone, forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them.

(2.) It was because he could not appear with any safety: “*They seek my life to take it away; and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude than lose my life in a fruitless endeavour to reform those that hate to be reformed.*”

IV. God's manifestation of himself to him. Did he come hither to meet with God? He shall find that God will not fail to give him the meeting. Moses was put into the cave when God's glory passed before him; but Elijah was called out of it: *Stand upon the mount before the Lord*, v. 11. He saw no manner of similitude, any more than Israel did when God *talked to them in Horeb*. But, 1. He heard a strong wind, and saw the terrible effects of it, for it rent the mountains and tore the rocks. Thus was the trumpet sounded before the Judge of heaven and earth, by his angels, whom he makes *spirits*, or *winds* (^{QAD} Psalm 104:4), sounded so loud that the earth not only rang, but rent again.

2. He felt the shock of an earthquake.

3. He saw an eruption of fire, v. 12. These were to usher in the designed manifestation of the divine glory, angels being employed in them, whom he *maketh a flame of fire*, and who, as his ministers, march before him, to *prepare in this desert a highway for our God*. But,

4. At last he perceived a *still small voice*, in which *the Lord was*, that is, by which he spoke to him, and not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Those struck an awe upon him, awakened his attention, and inspired humility and reverence; but God chose to make known his mind to him in whispers soft, not in those dreadful sounds. When he perceived this,

(1.) *He wrapped hi face in his mantle*, as one afraid to look upon the glory of God, and apprehensive that it would dazzle his eyes and overcome him. The angels *cover their faces* before God in token of reverence, (^{3RD} Isaiah 6:2. Elijah hid his face in token of shame for having been such a coward as to flee from his duty when he had such a God of power to stand by him in it. The wind, and 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.

(2.) He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. This method of God's manifesting himself here at Mount Horeb seems to refer to the discoveries God formerly made of himself at this place to Moses.

[1.] Then there was a tempest, an earthquake, and fire (~~8218~~ Hebrews 12:18); but, when God would show Moses his glory, he *proclaimed his goodness*; and so here: *He was, the Word was, in the still small voice.*

[2.] Then the law was thus given to Israel, with the appearances of terror first and then with a voice of words; and Elijah being now called to revive that law, especially the first two commandments of it, is here taught how to manage it; he must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but he must endeavour, with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not forsake them when he should be addressing them. Faith comes by hearing the word of God; miracles do but make way for it.

[3.] Then God spoke to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias, he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid; see ~~8218~~ Hebrews 12:18, etc.

V. The orders God gives him to execute. He repeats the question he had put to him before, "*What doest thou here?*" This is not a place for thee now." Elijah gives the same answer (v. 14), complaining of Israel's apostasy from God and the ruin of religion among them. To this God gives him a reply. When he wished *he might die* (v. 4) God answered him not according to his folly, but was so far from letting him die that he not only kept him alive then but provided that he should never die, but be translated. But when he complained of his discouragement (and whither should God's prophets go with their complaints of that kind but to their Master?) God gave him an answer. He sends him back with directions to appoint Hazael king of Syria (v. 15), Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the eminency of the prophetic office (v. 16), which is intended as a prediction that by these God would chastise the degenerate Israelites, plead his own cause among them, and *avenge the quarrel of his covenant*, v. 17. Elijah complained that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished. The judgment of famine was too gentle, and had not reclaimed them; it was removed before they were reformed: "*I have been jealous,*" says he, "for God's name, but

he himself has not appeared jealous for it.” “Well,” says God, “be content; it is all in good time; *judgments are prepared for those scorers*, though they are not yet inflicted; the persons are pitched upon, and shall now be nominated, for they are now in being, who shall do the business.”

1. “When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall make bloody work among the people (^{<1182>}2 Kings 8:12) and so correct them for their idolatry.”
2. “When Jehu comes to be king of Israel he shall make bloody work with the royal family, and shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry.”
3. “Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and, when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and be a remaining witness against the apostasy of Israel, and even he shall slay the children of Bethel, that idolatrous city.” Note, The wicked are reserved to judgment. *Evil pursues sinners*, and there is no escaping it; to attempt an escape is but to run from one sword's point upon another. See ^{<2484>}Jeremiah 48:44, *He that flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare*. Elisha, with the *sword of the Spirit*, shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war and Jehu's sword of justice. *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*, ^{<3104>}Isaiah 11:4; ^{<3105>}2 Thessalonians 2:8; ^{<3005>}Hosea 6:5. It is a great comfort to good men and good ministers to think that God will never want instruments to do his work in his time, but, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

VI. The comfortable information God gives him of the number of Israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone (v. 18): *I have left 7000 in Israel (besides Judea) who have not bowed the knee to Baal*. Note,

1. 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. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah (^{<5104>}Romans 11:4) and applies it to his own day, when the Jews generally rejected the gospel. *Yet, says he, at this time also there is a remnant*, v. 5.

2. It is God's work to preserve that remnant, and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace they could not have distinguished themselves: *I have left me*; it is therefore said to be a remnant *according to the election of grace*.
3. It is but a little remnant, in comparison with the degenerate race; what are 7000 to the thousands of Israel? Yet, when those of every age come together, they will be found many more, 12,000 *sealed out of each tribe*, ~~<1101>~~ Revelation 7:4.
4. God's faithful ones are often his hidden ones (~~<981B>~~ 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.
5. *The Lord knows those that are his*, though we do not; he sees in secret.
6. There are more good people in the world than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think the corruption is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven, as we shall miss a great many whom we thought to meet there, so we shall meet a great many whom we little thought to find there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity and more extensive.

~~<1199>~~ 1 KINGS 19:19-21

THE CALL OF ELISHA

Elisha was named last in the orders God gave to Elijah, but he was first called, for by him the other two were to be called. He must come in Elijah's room; yet Elijah is forward to raise him, and is far from being jealous of his successor, but rejoices to think that he shall leave the work of God in such good hands. Concerning the call of Elisha observe,

1. That it was an unexpected surprising call. Elijah found him by divine direction, or perhaps he was before acquainted with him and knew where to find him. He found him, not in the schools of the prophets, but *in the field*, not reading, nor praying, nor sacrificing, but *ploughing*, v. 19. Though a great man (as appears by his feast, v. 21), master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he did not think it any disparagement to him to follow his business himself, and not only to inspect his servants, but himself

to lay his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not at all put us out of the way of our heavenly calling, any more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough the feed Israel and to sow the *seed of the word*, as the apostles were taken from fishing to catch men. Elisha enquired not after Elijah, but was anticipated with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us, first.

2. That it was a powerful call. Elijah did but *cast his mantle upon him*. (v. 19), in token of friendship, that he would take him under his care and tuition as he did under his mantle, and to be one with him in the same clothes, or in token of his being clothed with the spirit of Elijah (now he put some of his honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, ^{<4271>}Numbers 27:20); but, when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, ^{<4213>}2 Kings 2:13. And immediately he *left the oxen* to go as they would, and *ran after Elijah*, and assured him that he would follow him presently, v. 20. An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing (^{<3818>}Psalm 110:3), nor would any come to Christ unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to *ask* leave, but only to *take* leave, of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his (^{<4261>}Luke 9:61) that desired he might *bid those farewell that were at home*, but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bade him to back and do it, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back, and not return, for any thing he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that those who are good are good of choice and not by constraint, not pressed men, but volunteers.

3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell-feast he made for his family (v. 21), though he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel and her party. It was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to wear his coat; yet Elisha cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great fast when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ.

4. That it was an effectual call. Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but *ministered to him* as his servitor, *poured water on his hands*, ~~<LXX>~~ 2 Kings 3:11. It is of great advantage to young ministers to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom, and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach must have time to learn; and those that hope hereafter to rise and rule must be willing at first to stoop and serve.