“I’m going to Disney World!” This advertising phrase was first uttered in 1987 by Phil Simms, the quarterback of the Super Bowl champions New York Giants. Numerous other famous athletes (and some winners of non-sporting events) have appeared on these commercials since then. The phrase is so popular that you can hear Little League coaches jokingly say after a win, “We’re going to Disney World.” Champions normally celebrate, but normally not at Disney World, which makes it funny and memorable. We are used to seeing champagne poured on heads in the locker room, parades in the city, and much more. (Rick Pitino, the coach of the NCAA champion Louisville Cardinals actually got a back tattoo this year to celebrate! I think he should have gone to Disney World instead!).

Elijah just won the Superbowl at Carmel. He would make a great candidate for a Disney World commercial. But we do not see him going to Disney World, having a parade, getting a back tat, or riding off into the sunset in triumph. Chapter 19 does not begin the way we expect at all. We expect to the see Israel “turning their hearts back” to God (18:37). After all, in response to God burning up the soggy altar, they fell on their faces and confessed, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God” (39). But do we see a national revival occurring? No. We hope to find wicked King Ahab, return to the palace and remove Jezebel for her idolatrous influence in the land. After all, we left him in chapter 18, obeying Elijah’s word (42, 45). But is that what Ahab does? No, he does not. His repentance was false, and his spine was like a jellyfish. He runs back and tattles on Elijah to the Baal-promoting Phoenician Queen. We wonder if Jezebel will surrender her false theology and repent. Instead, she seeks to put Elijah to death. We at least expect to find “Mr. My God is Yahweh” standing tall in the midst of this rebellion. After all, “the hand of the Lord was on Yahweh” (46). But is that what happens? No, he does not. We find our brother Elijah depressed, throwing a pity-party, running from Jezebel, and asking God to take his life.

We have read of Elijah’s mountain top experience at Mount Carmel, but now we see Elijah down in the valley under a broom tree. Before he was ministering to others, but now he is focused upon himself. Elijah confronted Ahab and the false prophets courageously, but here we find him running from a single lady cowardly. Previously, Elijah moved at God’s Word, but now we see him fleeing apart from God’s Word. In the previous chapters we see him praying for rain and fire, but now he we find praying for God to God to take his life.

Elijah’s faith and prayer life have challenged us, but now Elijah’s spiritual collapse serves as a warning to us, and provides some wise counsel to us.
Elijah was a man like us (James 5:17a), which means he experienced the same temptations and struggles that we face, including spiritual discouragement and despair. I have struggled with what to call his condition here. Alistair Begg called his exposition “Down in the Valley.” Spurgeon entitled it “Faintness and Refreshing.” Sinclair Ferguson’s exposition of chapter 19 is called “Experiencing Spiritual Depression.” Steve Brown also called it “Spiritual Depression.” Paul House calls Elijah a “prophet drained of strength” in a “pit of fear and depression” (224). Faucett and Brown call this “Depression of Mind.” (Commentary Critical and Explanatory). Provan says he is a man who “has had enough” (144). Hughes and Laney call it, “discouragement and deep despair.” Ryken says he “has descended into the blackness of spiritual despair” (516). D.A. Carson and others write, “In the depths of depression and despair, he prayed that he might die” (New Bible Commentary). “Spiritual depression” seems to be a good description of Elijah’s condition.

My hero, Charles Spurgeon, knew of spiritual depression. In his classic book, Lectures to My Students, he has a chapter entitled “The Minister’s Fainting Fits,” in which he addresses this matter. He writes:

Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always so vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. [I know] by most painful experience what deep depression in spirit means. (Lectures, 154)

Others have suffered periods of discouragement and despair in church history. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Martin Luther, William Cowper, Mother Theresa, Henry Nouwen, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others experienced what some call “The Dark Night of the Soul.”

After Hurricane Katrina, I suffered myself, trying to deal with my despair with four scoops of Moose Tracks ice cream every night! Of course, many pastors feel despair every Monday! That is why many counsel pastors to mow their yard or steam clean their carpet on Monday, for at least they will have some feeling of accomplishment after feeling like a failure from the previous day.

I heard Mark Driscoll use the phrase “Bread Truck Mondays” during this time. He reported that sometimes he dreams about what he could do other than pastor on Mondays, like driving a bread truck. He said he imagines the bliss of only being
responsible for bread, not people. Bread does not commit adultery, lie, have unpredictable giving patterns, or gossip. Driscoll liked the idea of driving around listening to sports talk radio instead of enduring the mental strain that goes along with pastoring!

So we can understand a person's struggle in this area. We should not be surprised by spiritual depression, but we should not want to remain there either! Why? Lloyd-Jones mentions two important reasons saying, “[I]t is very sad that anyone should remain in such a condition … [and] such people are very poor representatives of the Christian faith” (Lloyd, Jones, Spiritual Depression, 23). Yes! We need to learn from Elijah's struggle so we may avoid it or not remain there any longer. And we need to consider this subject so that we may present the gospel in a way that is compelling and makes Jesus look glorious. It is hard to communicate this way when we are downcast. It is like we are saying, "My life stinks. Do you want to be a Christian too?" We believe that a fruit of the Spirit is joy! When you read through Acts, you find a happy group of witnesses! There joy was attractive and contagious.

Before moving on, let me qualify the matter. I do not mean that we should go around smiling all the time. Not all brokenness is negative; indeed, it is appropriate. We should grieve over our lost neighbors, injustice, poverty, and other effects of this fallen world. Further, sometimes being “down” is a natural, physical experience. Spurgeon said, “Certain bodily maladies, especially those with the digestive organs, the liver, and the spleen, are the fruitful fountains of despondency … As to mental maladies, is any man altogether sane? Are we not all a little off balance?” (Spurgeon, 155). Indeed. Sometimes, the reason many pastors are down on Monday is quite simply a matter of adrenaline depletion. You only have so much, and you must be rest and be restored. You cannot keep stretching the rubber band, using adrenaline when you do not need it, never taking a break. Eventually, the rubber band will break. You will eventually pay for not resting.

However, sometimes, we are down for no good reason, and we must look away from our self to the finished work of Jesus, in order to be free of this down cast demeanor and to commend the gospel to others. Derek Thomas puts it this way:

There are various kinds of depression, to be sure, and some are the result of complex physical and psychological disorders. But there are times when we are spiritually depressed for no good reason. There are times when the best thing to do with our feelings is to challenge them: ‘Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God’ (Ps. 42:11). (Derek Thomas, In Dark Places).
This passage shows us some of the causes of Elijah’s spiritual depression, and how God tenderly responded to him. My goal is not to address all of the complicated matters related to depression, but instead is an attempt to talk about the spiritual dynamics associated with it (recognizing that we are complex creatures, with the physical and spiritual always affecting each other). Olley summarizes the overarching application well,

Depression has been known for years; ‘burn-out’ is a recently named phenomenon. The narrative is brief, but it provides encouragement to people experiencing such, and is an example of God’s compassionate understanding response. Throughout Yahweh meets Elijah’s depression and resignation with gentle and patient understanding and quiet revelation, and an expression of trust in giving a task that is new.” (181)

Let us find encouragement from this chapter by considering it under two headings: (1) Elijah’s Spiritual Depression and (2) God’s Restoring Grace.

**Elijah’s Spiritual Depression**

Before we note the reasons or causes of Elijah’s despair, consider the course of it, that is, what actually happened in the story. We can trace the course in five sections.

**The Course**

The first problem that stands out is how *Elijah lost perspective*. He lost sight of the fact that a short-term victory does not mean the war is over. He had been triumphant at Carmel, but he would be engaged in a battle until his life was over. He had a relentless foe in Jezebel. She was not just a single lady with an attitude. She had tremendous resources at her disposal, and she was angry at the defeat. When this Baal-promoting queen saw the rain, she was probably ready to attribute that to her “storm god.” However, Ahab comes back to relay the news, and tells her that not only did Yahweh send the rain, but also Elijah slew Baal’s prophets (17:1). A poor loser can be vicious. Jezebel is determined to take out Elijah (2).

The battle never ends for the believer. Yesterday’s victory does not ensure today’s victory. Everyday we must rely on God’s power to overcome today’s challenges. Apart from God’s strength, Elijah was a weak man. In the words of Jesus, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We must take the long view on the Christian life. Until you see Jesus, you are engaged in a war.
Second, Elijah lost his commitment to follow God’s Word. Elijah did not allow God’s Word to direct his path. After reading of Jezebel’s threat, the writer says, “Then Elijah was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there (3). In chapter 17-18, the writer records how “the word of the Lord came to Elijah,” then “he went” (17:2, 5, 8, 10, 18:1-2). But now, there is no word from the Lord, and Elijah seemingly departs on his own. The “word of the Lord” does not appear again until verse 18:9. Elijah seems to puts God’s Word behind his back, and lives as his own master. He has lost his spiritual bearings, and drifted from his routine of depending on God’s Word to determine his steps. He is AWOL.

We will face the same temptation. Will we order our lives by God’s authority, or will we do what we want, when we want, how we want? When we get away from the simple discipline of regularly reading and applying God’s Word, we will drift into ungodliness and spiritual darkness. If you are not in God’s Word, the question is not will you drift away from God’s will, but when, and how far will you go?

Third, Elijah lost his vision of the greatness of God. The writer says that Elijah “was afraid” (3, ESV). The word can be translated “saw.” He saw and ran for his life. How could the mighty Elijah be afraid? He was gripped by fear because he took his eyes off of the greatness of God. We previously read of how Elijah stood before Ahab declaring “as the Lord, the God of Israel lives” (17:1). But here he drops his elevated concept of God and panics. Some argue that he did not leave out of fear of his own life, but as a purposeful withdrawal as a judgment on Israel, and as an intentional journey to the mountain where Yahweh first cut the covenant with Israel. I find this hard to believe. I see a more human, frail picture of Elijah, running for his life. House says, “For whatever reason—fatigue, lack of faith, or a sense of resignation at the prospect of never having peace—Elijah flees” (222). I think all three probably contributed, but it was not for reason to allow judgment to fall on Israel. His fleeing in chapter 17, and here in 19 appears to be two different experiences. The first was positive, but his one is negative. I agree with Provan who writes that Elijah runs “as far away from Jezebel as he can get.” He adds, “The journey south was certainly not on God’s agenda” (144).

Fourth, because we lost perspective, his spiritual bearings, and his vision of God, he lost his fight. The writer tells us, “he fled” (3). But notice, where he flees. He goes all the way to Beersheba! As you read through the Old Testament you will see the phrase
“from Dan to Beersheba” representing the northern and southern parts of the Promised Land. Elijah heads to the deep south, abandons his servant, and then goes “a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree” (4a). When faced with the question of “fight or flight” Elijah had responded to conflict with “fight.” But now he loses his fight, and runs away.

While we may not have a lady named Jezebel who wants to kill us, we are engaged in a spiritual battle. We must deal those issues that are threatening the kingdom of God in our lives. When we fail to tackle the most pressing spiritual issues before us, we discover that we are unable to deal with smaller matters well. You cannot work around your challenges for long. You have to fight them.

Finally, Elijah lost his desire to live. We are stunned by the writer’s words, “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” (4b). Elijah was not the first person to despair of life, and he was not the last. Moses told God, “kill me at once” (Num 11:15); Job wished that he would have never been born (Job 10:18-19); Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (Jer 20:14); Jonah asked God to take away his life because death was better than life (Jon 4:3). These men longed for death, but they did not actually take their lives. Instead, we read of how God sustained and restored them. The good news is that God brought him out of it. We should consider the fact that we have this story to be a good sign. No one else could have reported it than Elijah. God brought him through it. And interestingly, he was the one prophet who never died at all, but was instead taken up into heaven! (2 Kings 2:11)

Have you ever said, “I’ve had enough, Lord?” If so, then you can identify with this struggling saint. Whether it is your temptation to leave your spouse, your job, or this life, there is hope in this story. God deals with Elijah with amazing grace and patience.

The Causes

But what led to this course? How did Elijah despair of life itself? (4). Surely there are numerous factors leading to this situation. As noted, there were natural and spiritual factors, and these two are not unrelated. Let us consider them in four categories. Some are plainer in the text in the others.

Let us begin with a clear factor. Elijah was drained. Physically, he had been a man on the run for three years, living by God’s miraculous provision of bread. When he sent Ahab to Carmel to eat and drink (1 Kings 17:41-42), Elijah went to pray. Then he ran seventeen miles ahead of Ahab to Jezreel. But he was not done running. The distance from the top of Mount Carmel to Beersheba is about 120 miles. It would take a
traveler about six days, unless he ran part of the way. The we read that he went another
day into the wilderness. Later, he would travel all the way to Mount Horeb (8). That all
adds up to about 300 miles! When we are physically tired, we are spiritually vulnerable
as well.

   Emotionally, he was also drained. He presumably had a let down after his victory
at Carmel. We can relate to this. We are vulnerable after a victory. We need manna
every day. We can live on yesterday's victories.

   Sometimes, God wants to humble us with trials to teach us to depend on him.
After describing his great experiences, including being caught up into the third heaven,
Paul says, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing
revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to
harass me, to keep me from being conceited” (2 Cor 11:7). Notice twice Paul says that
Paul was afflicted with this un-removable “thorn in the flesh” (8) in order to humble him,
and he goes on to say that it helped learned to rely on God’s sufficient grace and power
(9-10). In other words, Paul could not even stay up on the mountain constantly, and
God in his infinite wisdom chose to humble him through trials. When afflicted we must
follow Paul’s lead, and not slip into depression, but rather rely on God’s grace and
power.

   Spiritually, he was drained. He was the object of intense spiritual opposition.
Surely, this drained him. Evil opposition takes its toll on us, and we will be tempted to
give in, and not rely on God’s strength.

   Ministerially, he may have felt like he had nothing left to give. He was a worn out
servant. In his book, Leading on Empty, Wayne Cordeiro says, “Those whose vocation
is all about giving out are wearing out” (24). He tells the story of how he went for a run
before a leadership conference in California, and later found himself on curb weeping
uncontrollably (13). He asked, “What in the world is happening to me?” He learned that
he had been leading on empty. Cordeiro writes, “The only way to finish strong will be to
first replenish your system. If you don’t, prepare for a crash” (26).

   I have learned that replenishing is a spiritual discipline. I was on a panel last
week with some well known pastors. The question was asked, “What do you do to
recover?” Two of the three said they take Monday off. Another, had a different answer,
but had a plan for recovery. I told them “I’m working on it. I think I’ll give Monday a try
this fall.” The fact is, I have never taken a day off regularly. But I do not want to cry on a
curb one day because I have not taken care of myself. Beside that, I believe we are
better with a combination of work, rest and play. I need to execute my philosophy and rest!

As I have been doing the “Insanity” workouts, I have noticed how much they promote recovery. We have a recovery day each week and a recovery week in between the nine-week workout. We also have “recovery formula” that is recommended. Gatorade also has a drink now, to go along with their pre-work out and during work out drink, that is a recovery drink. We have to allow our bodies and souls to recover and be replenished. Elijah needed to recover, and so do we.

Second, Elijah was disappointed. Though we do not read this explicitly in the text, I think it is a safe assumption to make that the “result at Carmel was not what Elijah expects” (Olley, 178). Elijah probably thought revival would come to the land, as people turn their hearts back to God, and even king Ahab would repent. His hopes were sky high, but then they were dashed when he heard of the threat of Jezebel. This dejection had to crush him.

Third, Elijah was isolated. We have followed Elijah in chapters 17-18, and he has been a man virtually alone. If he is indeed “a man like us,” that means he needs fellowship. In chapter 19, Elijah leaves his servant behind and departs by himself, not for prayer for a pity-party in which he is the host and the only guest.

Ryken notes, “Depression is not only caused by the absence of community; it also perpetuates it” (523). If you are tired and discouraged, isolation is not what you need. You need others to encourage you and lift your spirits. We cannot go without human relationships very long. We are made for community. This reality was illustrated in the movie Castaway, in which Tom Hanks is alone on an island, and after a while he invents a friend out of a volleyball, whom he names “Wilson.” We were not made to be on an island by ourselves, but in community. And God has met that need physically in family, and spiritually in the church.

Fourth, Elijah believed half-truths that triggered feelings of self-righteousness, self-pity and self-importance (Ryken, 533-34). Elijah mentions that he is not any better than his fathers (4b). Did he previously think he was the best of all time? Sure, he had been a great prophet, but what was he currently doing? He was running away. He also states “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 the prophets with the sword, and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away” (10). Part of this statement was true. The people did forsake the Lord, but some turned back it seems. What of the altar? It was rebuilt. What of the prophets? Was it not the prophets of Baal that were destroyed in the previous chapter? In mixing truth and
falsehood, he goes on to note that he was zealous for the Lord. True, but look at him now. What is he doing? He is running from Jezebel. Did he have reason to boast? No. The Lord has to question him, “What are you doing here Elijah?”

Instead of repenting and asking for grace, Elijah turns to the comparison game to make himself superior. That is what self-righteous people do. They compare like the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in Jesus’ parable (Luke 18:11). “Lord, I’m glad I’m not like this man” is the way their self-righteous prayer begins. Do you think you are superior to others? Do you think you are the only zealous one out there? Be very careful of the blinding sin of self-righteousness. There is only one who is totally righteous, and that person is not you.

Notice also his feeling of self-importance. He stated that he was the only one serving God presently (10, 14). He says, “I, even I only, am left” (10). In the age-old battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the servant, Elijah thought he was the last in the line, and if he throws in the towel, then God loses. He apparently thinks he is the solitary seed left. He has forgotten some things about the line of David, and he has forgotten some other things. Like what about the one hundred prophets that Obadiah was serving? Sure, they were hiding in a cave, but look at Elijah! Further, God tells him that he has “seven thousand in Israel” (18). What is Elijah doing? He is exaggerating how important he is. Was he important? Most definitely. But he was not the only servant in Israel.

This feeling of self-importance can easily arise in our hearts. You might think you are “the only one” who cares about prayer, or justice, discipleship, or evangelism, or you are the only one ever preparing the fellowship, or giving to missions. If that is your feeling, your pride will eventually turn to despair. You must keep a sober assessment of yourself.

Then consider his self-pity. He stated that others wanted to take his life (10b, 14b). This was simply inaccurate. Jezebel wanted to take his life, but we do not read that the whole nation of Israel was trying to do so. What do you call this? It is called it self-pity. Self-pity happens when you exaggerate the problem. That is what depressed people do; they make things sound worse than they really are.

Believing half-truths is a temptation for us all. Exaggerating our righteousness, our importance, and our problems feeds our flesh, and we must fight it. How? Quite simply, we must believe the pure truth of the gospel. Spurgeon said:

I find myself frequently depressed – perhaps more so than any other person here. And I find no better cure for that depression than to trust in the Lord with all my heart, and seek to realize afresh the power of the peace-speaking blood of Jesus, and His infinite love in dying upon the cross to put away all my transgressions.
Similarly, Elyse M. Fitzpatrick writes,

The depressed don’t simply need to feel better. They need a Redeemer who says, “Take heart, my son, my daughter; what you really need has been supplied. Life no longer need be about your goodness, success, righteousness, or failure. I’ve given you something infinitely more valuable than good feelings: your sins are forgiven. (“The Gospel Cure”)

In the words of Lloyd-Jones, we spend too much time “listening to ourselves,” and not enough time “talking to ourselves” (Spiritual Depression, 20). What does it look like to preach to yourself? He writes,

Would you like to be rid of this spiritual depression? The first thing you have to do is to say farewell now once and for ever to your past. Realize that it has been covered and blotted out in Christ. Never look back at your sins again. Say: “It is finished; it is covered by the Blood of Christ.” That is your first step. Take that and finish with yourself and all this talk about goodness, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only then that true happiness and joy are possible for you. What you need is not to make resolutions to live a better life, to start fasting and sweating and praying. No! You just begin to say: “I rest my faith on Him alone who died for my transgressions to atone.”(Spiritual Depression, 35)

Are you drained? Are you disappointed? Are you isolated? Are you believing half-truths? What we need is heavy doses of grace and truth that is in Jesus.

**God’s Gracious Response**

How did God minister to his depressed servant? He ministered to him with patient grace and tender compassion. The three means of grace that God used for Elijah involved (1) Bread in the Wilderness, (2) A Voice on the Mountain, and (3) A Vision for the Future.

The echoes of Moses in the wilderness are loud. The angel of the Lord provides bread and water in the wilderness, so Elijah can travel forty days and forty nights to the mount of God (5-8). Forty days reflects Israel’s forty years. He meets the Lord at the mount of God in Horeb, and he saw God’s glory and received God’s Word. These parallels highlight the faithfulness of God and the amazing patience and grace of God. Such faithfulness and grace and patience should encourage us.
#1: Bread in the Wilderness (5-8)

God’s first response to Elijah was not rebuke. It was “eat.” He had fed him with a raven, and with a widow, and now he feeds him with an angel. As he slept under the broom tree, he awoke to an angel who touched him and said, “Arise and eat” (5). Then we read that Elijah looked and there was a “cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water” (6a). Elijah then “ate and drank and lay down again” (6b). This happened again a second time (7), and then we read that he “went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb” (8). That is some good bread! (It actually reminds us of another in the wilderness besides Moses who could go forty days and forty nights, Jesus, who fought the enemy victoriously. Matt 4, Luke 4).

How encouraging is that God feeds his runaway prophet, instead of actually answering his prayer for death? I find this remarkably encouraging. John Piper has written a deeply edifying poem on Elijah. In part three of it, he says:

Elijah fled to Judah, then
Beyond Beersheba’s well full ten
More miles, and fell exhausted there
Beneath a spreading broom tree where
He sat and asked the Lord that he
Might die. Instead he slept. The tree
God made to give him shade, then sent
An angel down with food, who went
And woke the prophet thus: “Awake!
Instead of death, God gives you cake.
By this you will walk forty days
And forty nights until you gaze
Like Moses on the majesty
Of God. Nor am I sure that
He Will ever grant your wish to die.
Come now, Elijah, eat and fly. (“Elijah, Part 3”)

Instead of death, God gave him cake. Oh, the tenderness of God here. He will rebuke him later, but first, we find gentleness and care. Perhaps this is a good parenting rule as well.

Are you drained and dejected like Elijah? Consider also the ministry of Jesus, who tells us, “Come to me, all you labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest …

For I am gentle” (Matt 11:28). What you need is spiritual rest in Christ, the bread of life (John 6:35). There, we find forgiveness and joy, knowing that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When you have had enough, and look to him, you find he is enough.
And perhaps you need physical rest. Good food and good sleep are wonderful cures to spiritual depression. Sleep and food after all, are gifts of God (Ps 104:14-15; 127:2). Look at what kind of God you have. When you run away like Elijah, he says, "Have breakfast." Remember when Peter denied Jesus, and Jesus made him breakfast! He renewed him physically and spiritually. Elijah is being renewed by the grace of God. The scene here illustrates Isaiah’s words, who say says that we must wait on the Lord and “renew our strength” then we shall “run and not be weary” “walk and not faint” (Is 40:31).

It may be a stretch, but I wonder if this angel did not also provide some companionship for this lonely servant. Elijah needed a companion, and he received a fresh touch from this angel. Later, he will receive a wonderful companion in Elisha. Elijah like us, need company. Maybe you need some companionship. Do not run from this need. Seek a local body of believers with which to fellowship. Perhaps, God wants to use you to minister to the lonely, depressed servant. Take them a cake and spend some time with them.

#2: A Voice on the Mountain (9-13a)

Now, Elijah goes to the mount of God. What will happen here? Will we find him still wallowing in self-pity, complaining, or will he respond with fresh vigor? We find him railing against the Israelites. Elijah’s memory is selective (Provan, 145), as demonstrated by his statement about the Israelites “forsaking your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword” (10). Again, he believes half-truths, wallowing in pity.

With the bread in the wilderness, God reminded him of the past. But Elijah is still depressed, and so God will now remind him of his power once again. This time Elijah will hear God’s voice at the mount. At this mount, Israel met with the Lord and discovered what God required of them (Ex 19-20 etc.) Now, God’s presence and God’s voice will be used to awaken him and sustain him.

In verses 11-12, Elijah stands before the Lord, and the Lord “passed by” (11), and a great wind tore through the mountains. Then there was an earthquake, then a fire. But the Lord was not in these powerful displays. Instead, after a fire, Elijah heard a “low whisper” (12). Upon hearing this, Elijah “wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave” (13a).
Previously, God showed up with fire, consuming the drenched altar. People marveled. But here, the emphasis is on God’s quiet ways. God often appears not in the spectacular but in the gentle whisper. Provan says, “Elijah needs to remember the past, but he also needs to realize that there is more to the LORD than fire” (146).

This phrase “a low whisper” (12, ESV), only appears to others times. It appears in Job 4:16 and Psalm 107:29, as an almost silent sound. It is used in both passages in the context of rest and refreshment in the midst of pain, distress, and fear.

Let us remember that God often works in quiet ways. David wrote, "your gentleness makes me great" (Ps 18:35). Do not go looking for fireworks and magic shows in worship services or conferences. Sometimes the fire does fall in corporate gatherings, but God also works quietly through his written Word and his Spirit in the hearts of his people. Do not always seek after controversy and drama. Seek the God of grace in the quiet place. Get alone with him and listen to his word. Think on his gospel.

#3: A Vision for the Future (9:13b-21)

Ryken notes, “Spiritual depression is hard to shake. It is not a twenty-four hour virus. Getting over it takes more than a pastor saying, “Take two Bible verses and call me in the morning” (530). After bread from an angel and a the quiet voice of God on the mountain, Elijah is still rehearsing his speech, when God asks him “Why are you here, Elijah?” (13). It is as if God says, “Let’s try this again.” But Elijah is inflexible. He responds with his same rehearsed speech (14). He is slow to understand and change, perhaps because he does not want to understand and change. But I want to point out here that in the midst of his depression Elijah is at least talking to God. If you ever sink this low, remember to keep speaking to God.

We see here that God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps 103:8). God's mercy is demonstrated this time by his giving Elijah a new vision for the future. This vision involves an assignment and a word of assurance. His assignment is to anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha (15-17). This may in fact be what the gentle whisper was about (Provan, 146). The ultimate victory over Baal worship will not be solved by the victory at Carmel, instead it will come through a slow political process that will extend beyond Elijah’s life. The defeat of Baal will not happen not by Elijah alone, nor will it happen in his lifetime.

Elijah’s job was not just to fight well in the present, but prepare others for the future. We will read of Elijah’s instructions being lived out in many chapters to come (cf., 2 Kings 8:7-15; 9-10). God teaches Elijah (and us) that no one is indispensable.
A new assignment often lifts us from the ashes. Such an assignment may involve preparing others for service. We must fight well in the present, but we must also prepare others for the future, like Jesus who fought victoriously, and trained up others to take the good news to the nations after his ascension.

We read of Elijah anointing Elisha, God's chosen prophet, in verses 19-21 (Provan think Elijah is unenthused with this assignment. I am not sure). Who was Elisha? His name means, “God saves.” He was a farmer, and apparently a wealthy one, since he had “twelve yoke of oxen” (19). Elijah put his cloak on him, symbolizing the transference of prophetic power (19). Elisha’s commitment is evidenced in what follows. The writer says, “he left the oxen and ran after Elijah” (20a). But then, Elisha requests, “Let me kiss my father and mother, then I will follow you” (20b). Elijah permits him to do so (20c). Then we read of Elisha’s total abandonment of all things for God’s will. Elisha kisses not only his family good-bye, but he kisses the world good-bye. He destroyed all of his old means of sustenance in verse 21. He tells everyone publically that he is following God’s will. What is more, he seems to be throwing a party to tell everyone. He is not reluctant; he is excited. Here is a picture of one saying, “You can have all this world, but give me Jesus!”

Elisha’s devotion to God’s call gets echoed in Jesus’ call to discipleship. In Luke 9, Jesus calls a man to follow him. And the man says, “I will follow you, but let me first say farewell to those at home” (Luke 9:61). He seems to say the same thing Elisha says, but instead of allowing it like Elijah, Jesus says, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). The reference to the plow sounds like 1 Kings, and so does this call. But notice, Jesus does not accept this request. Why? For this reason: Jesus is greater than Elijah, and his call takes precedence over everyone and everything. Jesus demands immediate obedience, and wholehearted allegiance. Elisha is being asked to follow a prophet, but we have been called to follow the Son of God. Follow him at once, and then deal with these other details later.

So God gives Elijah a fresh vision, which includes an assignment. Part of Elijah’s assignment involved a new partner. Notice the last sentence of the chapter, “Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him” (21b). Here, God not only gives Elijah an assignment, he gives him companionship. How this young apprentice must have given Elijah fresh strength. In 2 Kings 2:12, Elisha calls Elijah “father,” indicating the intimacy
the two shared. Elisha was like an intern, who apparently did some menial tasks, like washing the hands of Elijah (2 Kings 3:11).

God’s vision included not only a new assignment, but also a word of assurance. We skipped over it. In verse 18, God tells Elijah, “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.” Paul recalled this principle of God’s sovereign grace in Romans saying, “God has not rejected people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah…? ‘I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal’ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom 11:2, 4-5). In the words of Paul, “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: The Lord knows who are his” (2 Tim 2:19). The doctrine of God’s electing grace, should give encouragement to depressed servants.

Elijah was not the only one left in Israel to follow the living God. He was not the only seed to survive. God had a remnant. And God had preserved his people until the coming of the ultimate seed, Jesus appeared. Jesus was the slain seed, who was put into the ground, lying there silently, only to rise again triumphantly. Now, Jesus has a people, not just from Israel, but of every tribe, who have been chosen by grace. God’s saving grace was a word of assurance to Elijah, and it should be a wonderful word of assurance to us, as well. Look away from yourself, and look to Jesus, who said, “It is finished.”

Elijah would stand on a mountain again. And he would stand there with Moses. We read of it in the Gospels. This time it is not Mount Horeb but the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus took with him Peter, James and John. They saw him talking with them, as the dazzling glory of Jesus was unveiled for a moment. A voice from heaven was heard, “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!” (Luke 9:35). Until we gaze upon the face of Jesus, let us feast on him, the Bread of Life, let us listen to his voice, and let us be spurred on by a glorious future that awaits all of his suffering saints.