1 Kings 19: Elijah

Spiritual lows and burnout

Introduction.

You'll want to read chapter 18 for vital background. Have people read it before hand, and during the study, summarize it or read thru it quickly (at least beginning at 18:16). The Bible study discussion should focus on ch. 19. In this and the following studies, because of time limitations, it would be good to avoid getting into verse by verse exposition, and instead focus on important details, themes, and issues in the passage. And verse by verse exposition is unnecessary for studying this type of narrative passage.

This Bible study addresses issues of practical concern for Christians: dealing with spiritual lows, burnout, exhaustion, and depression -- and even patterns of unusual highs and lows that represent an unstable pendulum spirituality. These are problems that we've all probably faced or will face to some degree in the course of a normal, active Christian life. In more serious cases this leads to spiritual breakdown or spiritual collapse, which does happen to Christians in full-time ministry, lay ministry (like ourselves), or Christians undergoing emotional and spiritual duress.

Background & commentary.

Elijah has just defeated the prophets of Baal in a great showdown at Mt. Carmel, showing Baal (the pagan Canaanite / Ancient Near Eastern deity of harvest and fertility, which was popular at this time among the Israelites, who had forsaken God) to be a false and powerless god, and Jehovah to be the almighty true God. The corrupt king and queen of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel, were devout followers of Baal (Jezebel was in fact a foreigner from Tyre who actively promoted the Baal cult, especially her native Phoenician variety of Baal worship). Thousands of Israelites were impressed by Elijah's victory over the priests of Baal and gave glory to the God of Israel. As a result, God has ended the three-year drought that was sent to punish Israel for its unfaithfulness.

We would expect Elijah to be on a spiritual high after this, but actually, his high does not last long. As soon as he hears Jezebel wants to kill him, he dismisses his servant and runs away to Jezreel. Quite a turn around for a great prophet who had confronted kings and pagan priests, who was the epitome of spiritual strength and zeal for the Lord. He has lived under hardship during most of his prophetic ministry – living under a drought from God, living in a morally corrupt nation that served pagan idols with little interest in repenting and returning to God, being fed by ravens, living with a widow in poverty, and living under a death sentence from Ahab for three years. Why then was Elijah so discouraged after this great victory? Why did the queen's threat discourage him this time, when he had fearlessly confronted corrupt rulers before, including Ahab and Jezebel?

First, he is physically exhausted, not only from the great Elijah vs. Baal fight – the intense praying, probably losing a lot of sleep, and the emotional drain of this historical event – but also from running 30km to Jezreel. What is the first need of Elijah that God addresses? His physical needs for rest and food. Sleep deprivation and poor nutrition can seriously affect our emotional state, which in turn affects our spiritual lives. You may notice you are more susceptible to depression, spiritual lows, or spiritual attack when you're tired, stressed, or exhausted. God made our bodies to function as part of a whole being – physical, emotional, and spiritual – and when one suffers, the others do. While it is true that in times of physical duress we can pray for special strength to get thru an ordeal, that does not give us license to abuse our bodies, which are God's creation and function only in the way He intended. We may be tempted to deprive ourselves because we're busy, but at the cost of getting sick or depressed as a result. For some it is a point of spiritual pride to do so; but “just pray and God will give you strength” is not a biblical justification for self-deprivation for the prideful purpose of proving how spiritually tough you are (or “masoch” tough, or “super-student” stay-up-all-night-and-pop-caffeine-pills tough). In Elijah's case, his ability to think clearly, rationally, and biblically was seriously affected by exhaustion, stress, and physical deprivation.

Not only can Satan take advantage of physical and emotional tiredness to attack us spiritually, but also our spiritual highs. When we've managed to really grow more intimate with God, or have experienced spiritual victory in our lives, or are used by God in significant ways, Satan notices and doesn't like it. As in Elijah's case, he will come after us with various forms of spiritual attack. As in Elijah's case it may be direct spiritual and psychological warfare, and/or thru problems from other people or difficult situations that come from out of the blue. Spiritual victories and
growth come at a cost, and this is a normal part of spiritual warfare. Therefore, do not be surprised when you suddenly encounter difficulties and trials after a “spiritual high”, significant spiritual growth, or results in your personal ministry. These are to be taken as spiritual trials and/or attacks that need to be dealt with. They are somewhat to be expected, so do not let yourself be too discouraged by this.1

Besides exhaustion and spiritual attack, why is he so depressed? We see an important clue in v4 when he says, “it is enough” and expresses a death wish. For some reason he is frustrated and feels like giving up. He says he is “no better than my ancestors”. For some reason he feels useless and believes he has failed. Later, God asks him twice, “what are you doing?” to which he responds, “I have been very zealous for the LORd, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” Notice first all the pronouns -- “I” -- and that it is framed as if he alone was responsible and able to do the task of solving Israel's massive spiritual problems, but has failed. As Israel's chief prophet, he would have known that there were hundreds if not thousands of God-fearing prophets and laypeople who remained faithful to God. He is not the only one left, but he frames his thinking here in a harshly negative, self-critical way, which not only exaggerates the situation, but is unrealistically self-focused.

What emerges is a picture of a man who is not thinking rationally. After such a great victory, his answer to God seems unrealistically negative and self-focused. But God does not rebuke him harshly; rather, He deals with him gently and with a valuable object lesson to give him a proper perspective. Elijah has seen God manifested in an awesome miracle in the previous chapter. We often like to seek God in dazzling miracles, spiritual highs, emotional experiences, in obvious acts of judgment on the wicked, or attention grabbing spectacular events. But more often God works behind the scenes in less perceptible ways. In dealing with us, He doesn't speak to us from the clouds, in audible voices, or with tongues of fire for the world to see. He speaks to us thru His word, and He speaks to us thru the “still small voice” of the Holy Spirit. He works in less obvious ways in the world, which we can only see by faith, not by signs and wonders. In fact, when the Pharisees confronted Jesus and asked for signs to prove who he was, he pointed to his miracles of healing and salvation. He also pointed out that they would not believe spectacular signs, since they hadn't believed the signs of healing he had already shown. God's greatest miracles aren't parting seas or turning rivers into blood. His greatest miracles are saving sinners like us, and His greatest miracle is what Jesus did on the cross.

When we seek God in our daily lives, we cannot depend on emotions, miraculous experiences, signs, or sensational experiences. Though God certainly does these sometimes, our focus is wrong if we depend on such experiences. God's Spirit “speaks” to us only when we're willing to be quiet, be still, and listen. (“Be still and know that I am God”, Psalm 46:10.) Elijah had lost his proper focus and view of God, which God is trying to correct here.

God further addresses his issues of self-focus. He reminds him that there are 7000 other faithful believers in Israel. He also instructs him to annoint Elisha as his successor. God was already pleased with Elijah, but Elijah was never the final answer. It wasn't “all about him”. God works on a long-term scale, and we cannot grow frustrated when ministry or people's response to God doesn't go as quickly as we want it. We cannot measure spiritual success or what God is doing by just the fruits of our own service. We have to have a broader perspective of what God is doing thru other people over the longer course of time. God was preparing to take Elijah home and have others work if they are based on intense periodic spurts. It's also not good for you emotionally and spiritually, and you become dependent on emotions and temporary experiences rather than God himself. You've actually substituted a correct biblical view of God with something else that revolves around your emotional life. If, however, you find yourself caught up in a repeating cycle of spiritual highs followed by deep spiritual lows, and you are not able to break out of this cycle, then this is an indication of serious problems in your spiritual and emotional life. It is a form of serious spiritual instability, possibly involving satanic spiritual oppression or serious spiritual attack which in turn may be related to serious emotional-spiritual problems (and our emotional and spiritual lives are really intertwined and the Bible doesn't necessarily make a strong distinction between the two). If this is the case, you need to talk to a Christian counsellor or a pastor who is qualified to counsel you.

1 On the other hand, if you depend on spiritual highs for your spiritual growth or as a basis for your spiritual life, you are setting yourself up for a fall. Our spiritual lives are essentially a personal relationship with God, and relationships don't work if they are based on intense periodic spurts. It's also not good for you emotionally and spiritually, and you become dependent on emotions and temporary experiences rather than God himself. You've actually substituted a correct biblical view of God with something else that revolves around your emotional life. If, however, you find yourself caught up in a repeating cycle of spiritual highs followed by deep spiritual lows, and you are not able to break out of this cycle, then this is an indication of serious problems in your spiritual and emotional life. It is a form of serious spiritual instability, possibly involving satanic spiritual oppression or serious spiritual attack which in turn may be related to serious emotional-spiritual problems (and our emotional and spiritual lives are really intertwined and the Bible doesn't necessarily make a strong distinction between the two). If this is the case, you need to talk to a Christian counsellor or a pastor who is qualified to counsel you.
expectations of yourself and what you think you're supposed to be able to accomplish. Such comes more from pride than submitting to God's will for your life (and His particular calling and gifts for you). Elijah's unrealistic expectations about what he was supposed to accomplish led him to depression, because his goals were unrealistic and unattainable.

- **Pity party.** Indulging in self-pity (as in Elijah's case) happens when (1) our unrealistic expectations, whatever they may be, are not met; (2) when our thinking is self-focused rather than God-focused; and (3) similarly, when we are insecure or lacking in self-confidence, we are easily hurt by others, and again because our thinking is too self-focused rather than God-centered. We need to know God's presence and strength, so that we won't depend on ourselves. If we can depend on God like this, we won't be oversensitive.

- **“Lone Ranger” complex.** We often deceive ourselves into thinking we can do our ministry / service by ourselves. This is an unbiblical attitude – again, we're part of the body of Christ. Notice that Elijah dismissed his servant at Jezreel. After that, he was all alone. No one to be accountable to, and no fellow believer to give him counsel, prayer, or correction of his irrational thinking. We need to connect with fellow believers, make ourselves accountable to each other, and to correct and encourage each other. This is what the body of Christ is for. Do not isolate yourself from supportive relationships. You need to be ministered to just as much as you need to minister to others. Fellow believers can incarnate and minister God's love to you.

- **Working to earn God's approval.** We often think God will be impressed by the things we do (He isn't; if that were so important, He could “make the stones cry out” -- Luke 19:40, Mt. 3:9). We even start to base our spiritual lives on the things we do for God, rather than on the quality of our relationship with God. Before you try to do anything, God wants to have you; He wants your heart, your devotion, your intimacy. Confusing deeds with relationship is a fundamental error that we often make. The things we do are only effective and worthwhile if our walk with God is substantive, real, intimate and deep.

- **Working for others' approval.** We may be knowingly or unknowingly be motivated by a desire for affirmation or approval from others. Hence, our service or spiritual lives can become motivated by these desires, rather than to please God. When things don't go well and we face difficulties or criticism in our ministry or service, we react unspiritually, take it too personally, etc. We may also feel insecure, so when we are criticized, we easily become angry. Our strength and sense of security must come from being close to God, and our motives must be God-centered, so that we can properly handle criticism or obstacles in service.

- **Distorted view of God.** A pattern of working to earn God's approval and other problems may result from a distorted view of God, for example, when we wrongly transfer patterns of thinking from secular relationships, authority figures, or even from dysfunctional family relationships onto God. For example: If you had parents who were very demanding, unloving, showed only conditional love, etc., it is natural to transfer the types of expectations they placed on you onto your view of God. You try to work to earn God's approval – and probably without realizing what drives your behavior – and not understanding His love and acceptance for you. Your view of God is distorted and unbiblical. You learn to focus on works rather than the essence of an intimate relationship with God. In your personal and spiritual life, this can lead to perfectionism, spirituality based on legalism, becoming a workaholic, difficulty in establishing intimacy with God, etc. This also leads to unrealistic views and expectations of yourself.

- **Impatience with God.** Similarly, we may have a limited view of God and how He works. We may have unrealistic expectations or idealism about how God works in the world – that He should do things quickly (by our standards), rather than according to His plan. Elijah wanted to see the nation turned back to God, and expected to see Ahab and Jezebel change their opposition to God, or be removed. After Mt. Carmel, there were no miraculous changes in the nation, and he grew frustrated. He did not see what God was doing, and that it was on a grander historical scale, much of which would not happen in his lifetime. It is important to have a biblical perspective of a God who works in history on His own longer range plan, not according to our limited plan and perspective.

- **Unrealistic idealism.** This may be similar to the “save the world” complex. If we have unrealistic ideals about how the world should be, about how the church should be, what Christians are like, and how Christians are to do things, we will be disappointed. Likewise, if we put undue trust in spiritual leaders, we will be disappointed to learn later that they are fallible sinners (just like us). For example, many years ago I had unpleasant experiences with dysfunctional churches and fellowships. And while it is true that there were serious spiritual problems in those groups, my idealism only made me more confused and frustrated. I expected churches to be like the church in Acts, and if mine wasn't anything like the Acts church, I just had to keep looking. My unrealistic expectations of churches only led me to be unwise in looking for new ones.

- **Spiritual workaholic.** Don't try to take on too much work yourself. Even as just a fellowship coworker, I've done this to myself by taking on too many responsibilities at once. I rationalized it by thinking I was the only willing person, or the only or best qualified person for all these positions, not thinking that God can work around unfilled positions, or that younger, newer people need to be trained in new positions, or that God could raise up such people. This easily leads to burnout. Imagine the burnout faced by full time ministers who try to take on too much work, either because of a workaholic disposition, proud selfishness, unrealistic expectations, or lay people and congregations that are unwilling to do their fair share. The same also applies to us in lay ministry. Again, the body of Christ.

Elijah had just undergone an intense experiences at Mt. Carmel. Now at the end of ch. 19, God is in essence
telling him that he is not to continue a heavy prophetic work load. God intended to prepare others to take on some of his ministerial work, and others to take care of carrying out judgment on Ahab and Israel.

- **Spiritual imbalance** or lack of spiritual substance. Like a house built on sand (Matthew 7:26), if your spiritual life is imbalanced or missing something important, it can easily set you up for a fall. For example:
  - *Intellectualism.* God wants us to glorify Him with our intellectual being as well as emotional, but if we focus too much on theoretical, theological, or intellectual aspects of Christianity, then we become imbalanced. If we live in this kind of theoretical world, the essence of a dynamic, growing relationship with God is lost, and our spiritual lives grow cold. Then when the real world hits us with problems, we aren't rooted in Christ and we can't handle the pressure.
  - *Lack of substance.* The other extreme is not knowing God and the Bible in a substantive, meaningful way. If you've been a Christian for a while, you are called to become spiritually mature, which requires knowing and applying the Bible, knowing biblical teaching, knowing what you believe, and understanding your faith. If you are not well grounded in your faith but live as a superficial or immature believer, again you won't be able to handle the pressures of life.
  - *Living in the past.* As believers we should be rooted in the past, both what God has done in our lives, and what He's done in people's lives in the Bible. But we should also be growing and experiencing God each day, and not just live in the past or depend on the past as a basis for our current spiritual lives. This seems to be motivating Elijah as he flees to Horeb, where God established the covenant with Moses. His response to God's question makes a simplistic, limited comparison of the present difficulties with past glories, without considering God's overall plan and what He can do in the future.
  - *Dependence.* Some Christians fail to become very mature, but depend too much on a pastor, Christian parents, or spiritual leaders. They base their faith on others' spiritual lives. It is necessary to have your own relationship with God, rather than being dependent on others. This sometimes happens to children of Christian parents once they are on their own in college and find themselves confronted with new challenges and freedoms. They have their parents' faith, but have to go thru a process of making it their own faith and internalizing it, i.e., understanding it themselves rather than relying too much on what others tell them.

Questions and issues.

**Introduction.** Ask questions to get people to notice the factors that contributed to Elijah's behavior, his abrupt change in attitude from ch. 18 to ch. 19, and his depression. Get people to analyze him to see what misguided attitudes underlie his irrational statements (v. 4, v. 10, v. 14). Then discuss how God responds to him, rehabilitates him, and pulls him out of his personal crisis.

**Discuss** how we can avoid these pitfalls. What unrealistic attitudes and expectations might we have, and how might they cause us to stumble, spiritually and emotionally? How can we live balanced lives, so what we can handle stress and difficulties effectively? When we find ourselves depressed or burned out, how can we be restored? How do we recover from depression? What are important attitudes and appropriate expectations to have toward ourselves and God, so that we don't fall so easily when bad times befall us?

First, we want to discuss how God usually works in people's lives and communicates with us; how we have to be patient, humble, submissive to God's will, and be willing to be quiet and still to listen for the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit. We cannot let ourselves be frustrated by how bad things seem to be spiritually in the world, or among people we know who reject God. We have to understand that God is working at a scale that goes beyond our limited perspective or even our lifetime. This will keep us from being frustrated by the limited scope and fruits of our spiritual service and ministry – of us individually, of our church / fellowship, and in the unbelieving world around us. Second, we want to discuss some of the above pitfalls and how to avoid them in our spiritual lives. Second, we can examine ourselves for specific attitudes and problems like those in the preceding section.

1 Kings 19

1. **Intro and/or discussion questions.**

Have you ever felt too tired or stressed to continue serving God? Depressed? Felt like giving up spiritually? Why?

Have you ever felt like God had abandoned you?

Ever felt frustrated by the apparent lack of spiritual fruit or results in your life? -- In your personal spiritual life,

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2 In the following questions, feel free to apply 'serving God / service' to refer to (personal) ministry, living as a Christian, service in church / fellowship, being a witness, maintaining one's spiritual life, etc. Also feel free to consider stress, burnout, frustration, depression, exhaustion, (spiritual) discouragement, etc. to be interchangeable in these questions. Also be aware that a strict distinction between 'spiritual' and 'emotional' does not exist, nor is any absolute distinction found in Scripture. The two are closely intertwined, and each affects the other a great deal.
in the world around you, among those you try to influence, in your small group, among friends, in your family? Do you often feel frustrated because God doesn't seem to be doing anything about these situations? What causes you to become frustrated? stressed? depressed? spiritually discouraged? (Try to be more specific than simply “not enough faith”.) Have you ever been on a spiritual high or enjoyed much fruitfulness and growth, then strangely and suddenly fall into a spiritual or emotional rut? Why do you think you fell? Have you ever felt like you wanted to die? Explain.

2. Elijah's depression.

a. Physical needs.
Which of Elijah's needs does God take care of first? Why? What physical factors contributed to Elijah's state? Why are physical needs important? How can your physical state affect you emotionally/spiritually? In what ways can we become physically exhausted such that it leads to spiritual lows?

2b. Why so depressed?
Elijah's suicidal feelings in v. 4 seem irrational and unwarranted by the situation, especially after a great victory over the priests of Baal. But also look at v. 10 & v. 14. What attitudes do you see here? Are his perceptions accurate? In what ways are his views inaccurate? Self-focused rather than God-focused? Short-sighted? (E.g., toward... himself; God; how God works in history; what God expected of Elijah; what he was called to do in ministry; what God expected him to accomplish; Elijah's view of himself versus how God saw him; his view of what he was to accomplish; how he was to please God; the number of those still faithful to God who remained in Israel...)

2c. Handling rejection.
Elijah's faithful service was met with death threats from Jezebel, which greatly discouraged him. In serving God (e.g., at church), what are you most afraid of? How do these fears hinder your service? Have you ever been discouraged because someone criticized your faith or your service in church / fellowship? How do you react? Why is it so easy to be hurt by criticism of our service? If you are easily discouraged by such criticism, is your reaction a self-focused or Christ-centered response? Explain? How can you be stable enough so you are not discouraged or take it too personally?

2d. Our attitudes.
What unrealistic attitudes might we have toward God? How might our view of God be distorted or different from what the Bible tells us? What unrealistic attitudes might we have toward ourselves? How can these unrealistic attitudes set us up for a spiritual fall? (E.g.: Do you feel like it is your responsibility to fix other people's spiritual problems? Do you feel responsible for other people's spiritual lives? Where do you draw the line of responsibility and service?)

2d. Sources.
What distorted views of God do believers sometimes have? How can they be misguided motivations? How can they create barriers between you and God? Hinder your spiritual life? Cause us to stumble? What are the sources of our misguided or unreasonable attitudes toward God? Of ourselves? How do we correct these misguided and unbiblical views?

What is the nature of God's reponses to Elijah in v4? What is the nature of God's responses to Elijah in v12-13? What is God trying to teach Elijah in this object lesson? What is God teaching Elijah about Himself? About His nature? About relating to God?

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3 Depression and suicide are legitimate issues of discussion, as these are real issues that Christians sometimes face. However, if a group member indicates that s/he currently suffers from serious or prolonged depression, or has had recent or unresolved suicidal feelings, make sure s/he talks to a pastor or Christian counsellor immediately. Do not hesitate to get a pastor or other appropriate person involved if s/he is unwilling to seek help.
What does this say about how God speaks to us? When we are depressed, or when God seems far away, how do we reconnect with Him? How can we seek Him and be restored? How do we find spiritual healing?

How can taking on too much work (especially in spiritual service) be spiritually unwise or harmful? Does God expect great results from you? Or is there something more important? (e.g., Psalm 51:10)

What are God's intentions in v15-18? Why is God returning Elijah to work – but to a more reasonable or “reduced” work load? Why appoint Elisha as a successor? (Was God displeased with Elijah?) Why is it important for Elijah to distribute or delegate his responsibilities? What do these assignments indicate about the nature of Elijah's work? About God's time frame for this prophetic work and its results?

4. Further discussion.
What is currently the greatest hindrance in your spiritual life? The greatest barrier between you and God? How can you find spiritual renewal?

Notes.

Elijah was born in Tishbe, was fed by ravens at Kerith, lived with a widow (whose son he brought back to life) at Zarephath, in a Gentile area near the kingdom of Tyre. Near Jericho and the Jordan River he was taken up into heaven. His name means 'my God is the LORD'.

Ahab and Jezebel's reign begins in Kings 16:29. Jezebel was from Tyre, a Phoenician area in modern-day Lebanon. Her father was king over Tyre and Sidon and a priest of the Phoenician version of Baal. As a foreigner from Tyre, Phoenicia, she heavily promoted the worship of Baal, especially her national variety of Baalism. Besides their palace in Samaria, the capital city of Israel (the northern kingdom, after it separated from the southern kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam son of Solomon), they maintained an official residence in Jezreel.

Baal is pronounced [baːˈæl] or [baːl] in the original ancient languages, or [bɛːɪl] / [bɛːl] in Anglicized pronunciation.

18:46. Elijah was miraculously energized with spiritual strength to run ahead of Ahab's chariot to Jezreel. This demonstration of divine power should have been received by Ahab as another sign of God's strength. But Ahab was too stubborn to repent, and did not try to stop his wife from threatening Elijah.

19:3. Despite all the signs of God's power, Ahab and Jezebel continue to oppose God and Elijah. Elijah realizes that the “Battle of Mt. Carmel” has not persuaded them, and that he is being directly threatened now more than ever with death from Jezebel, who was the leading source of religious apostasy. Elijah flees from Mt. Carmel in the north (close to the border with Phoenicia, modern-day Lebanon) to the southernmost city of Beersheeba.

19:4. A broom tree is a desert shrub that sometimes grows large enough to provide some shade. Elijah has given up hope because all his efforts and miracles have not turned the nation around, and have not lead to the corrupt king and queen either repenting or being removed from power. Jezebel's death sentence seems to be the last straw for him. He declares in frustration, "it is enough" -- 'it's over, I can't take it anymore.'

19:5-6. God first takes care of Elijah's more pressing physical needs before Elijah is ready for spiritual counselling from God.

19:7-8. Apparently Elijah is already determined to journey to Mt. Horeb, although God has apparently not commanded him to do so. Mt. Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai (c. 400km from Beersheba), where God established His covenant with Moses. Elijah is depressed because the nation has forsaken its covenant with God,
and Elijah sees no hope of the situation improving, and thus wants to die. He is impatient and unable to see beyond the present moment to what God is doing on a long-term scale. Forty days in the Bible signifies trial and testing – the flood of Moses, the wandering in the desert after the exodus, and Jesus' desert testing and temptation (which recapitulates the similar desert testing of Elijah here).

19:9. God's questioning is probably gentle but intended to imply that Elijah has come to Sinai for his own misguided reasons.

19:10. Elijah doesn't quite get the question, and so God repeats it later. Elijah's pessimistic answer here implies that all of God's work that began with establishing God's covenant at Sinai centuries ago has come to nothing, and he bitterly complains that his own work has been fruitless. However, as the nation's leading prophet, he would be aware that a number of other prophets and believers existed, but his view of things is distorted. His exaggerated negative view is also seen in 18:22.

19:11. Bible scholars put forth several accounts of the wind, earthquake, and fire. Some see it as a foreshadowing of the multiple forms of judgment God is to carry out later upon Israel and the house of Ahab (19:15-17) – thru his successor Elisha, King Hazael of Aram (who became a threat later to Israel under kings Joram, Jehu and Jehoahaz – 2 Kings 8, 10, 12, 13), and Jehu (a military commander, who will kill off all of Ahab's house). Others see it as symbolic of different forms of divine power. Others see it as symbols for different forms of divine judgment to come upon Israel, but that it was also not yet God's will for these judgments to take place.

19:14. Elijah still doesn't understand what God's question really meant, as he repeats the same answer. His answer also reflects an attitude of living in the past without considering what God can do in the future. Elijah's attitude also focuses only on the present and on himself – what he thinks he was supposed to accomplish, rather than God's long-term plan.

19:15. God's instructions to Elijah indicate God's longer-term plans for Israel and nearby nations, and for Elijah's prophetic ministry. Elijah is to appoint his successor Elisha, who will carry on his work, and as a reward for his faithful service, Elijah is to be taken up directly into heaven (2 Kings 2) and recognized as one of the greatest prophets in history. Being taken directly to heaven is technically known as 'translation' (="being carried across"); Enoch in Genesis 5 is the only other Old Testament saint who was translated and did not experience death.