

FINDING GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

With Elijah on the Mountain
1 Kings 19

A FIVE-DAY READING PLAN



Trauma Healing
INSTITUTE



AMERICAN
BIBLE
SOCIETY

Welcome!

The great prophet Elijah has just defeated the prophets of Baal. He's on an emotional high, and then Queen Jezebel threatens him with death and he ends up in the wilderness. Follow his journey to the mountain of God as you explore God's great care in times of trial and transition.

© 2023 American Bible Society. All rights reserved. Permission granted to redistribute with credit and without alteration. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages are taken from the Good News Translation® © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.

[AmericanBible.org](https://www.AmericanBible.org) | [TraumaHealingInstitute.org](https://www.TraumaHealingInstitute.org)

DAY ONE

ELIJAH ON THE RUN

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 19:1-4

FOCUS

Reflect on today's reading using these questions.

1. What is Elijah feeling? Why is he feeling this way?
2. What does Elijah do in response to his feelings?

DEVOTION

Imagine for a moment that you are a prophet of God in a country where many people have turned away from following God and now worship an idol. In front of an audience of thousands, you witness God responding to your prayers and revealing himself as the ONE TRUE GOD to everyone. The false prophets are defeated. You have been vindicated as God reveals himself that day. And if that were not enough, you pray to end a three-year drought—and God does it. Right. On. Time. Everything seems to be going your way. You might imagine that nothing could shake your faith and your confidence in God's protection.

This is the backdrop for 1 Kings 19. But now Elijah is afraid for his life. He has a good reason. The most powerful woman in the country has promised he will die the very next day.

Most of us respond to traumatic experiences with automatic fight/flight or freeze responses. Elijah seems to have done both. First, he runs. And he runs for a long distance. It may have taken him days to get to the wilderness. Then he collapses. He wants to die in seclusion by himself. It appears he may feel deep shame: "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (v. 4 NIV).

CONNECT

1. Why do you think Elijah may have been vulnerable after his victories?
2. What experiences of trauma or transition have you had that led to you feeling something like Elijah does in the wilderness? How did you respond?

DIG DEEPER

If you have felt like Elijah, you are not alone. In Psalm 88:1-4 (GNT), the psalmist expresses the same sentiment to God. Consider how God gives us permission to express our faith even in our deepest pain:

LORD God, my savior, I cry out all day,
and at night I come before you.

² Hear my prayer;
listen to my cry for help!

³ So many troubles have fallen on me
that I am close to death.

⁴ I am like all others who are about to die;
all my strength is gone.

DAY TWO

GOD PROVIDES FOR ELIJAH'S NEEDS

SCRIPTURE 1 Kings 19:5–9a

FOCUS Reflect on today's reading using these questions.

1. What does God do in response to Elijah?
2. Is this what you would expect God to do?

DEVOTION While riding high after an amazing win over the false prophets of Baal, Elijah's life is threatened by Queen Jezebel. He runs to the wilderness hoping to hide and die alone. He laments that he is no better than his ancestors. How did you imagine God would respond to Elijah? You might think that God would be angry. You might think he would lecture Elijah about his lack of faith or demand that he get back to work. Instead, God provides surprising care for Elijah.

Notice what is not provided. There are no sermons, no lectures, no threats from God. Instead, God supplies Elijah's most basic needs. An angel brings food and water and lets him sleep. Elijah is then sent on a journey and finds the provisions are enough for him to complete the trip.

Think about what Elijah would have had to do on this forty-day hike. He would need to watch where he stepped to avoid tripping or getting stung by a scorpion. He would need to search for places to rest and sleep. Such attention to practical detail may have helped Elijah "get out of his head" and stop thinking so much about the threat on his life. It may have helped him to calm his emotions.

CONNECT

1. Looking back on difficult times in your life, what kinds of compassionate care did you receive? Did you receive lectures, explanations, or rebukes from well-meaning friends when you were at low points? How was it similar or different to how God responds to Elijah?
2. Like Elijah, what journey did (or do) you need strength to undertake?
3. Have you found physical exercise, like walking, helps you process your grief or stress?

DIG DEEPER You may be familiar with Psalm 34, which talks about God's compassion for the broken and crushed in spirit. Read verse 18 again as you consider how God expressed his compassion to Elijah.

The LORD is near to those who are discouraged;
he saves those who have lost all hope. (Psalm 34:18 GNT)

DAY THREE

ELIJAH TALKS TO GOD ABOUT HIS PAIN

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 19:9b-14

FOCUS

Reflect on today's reading using these questions.

1. How does God respond to Elijah?
2. What might these signs express about God?

DEVOTION

Elijah reaches Mount Horeb (also known as Mount Sinai) after a 40-day journey with no food. He finds shelter in a cave. He has had plenty of time to think about his experience on Mount Carmel and Jezebel's threat. When he arrives, God now speaks to him for the first time, asking, "What are you doing here?"

Elijah seems to feel pretty much the same as he did before his journey. He tells God a story of failure and trauma—that only he is left after faithless Israel has abandoned God and killed all the prophets. And now they are trying to kill him as well.

Notice that God still does not rebuke or correct Elijah's perspective. Instead, God shows his presence and power to Elijah. Then he asks Elijah a second time about what has brought him to this point in his ministry. God invites Elijah to talk about what he has experienced.

When a person experiences a trauma, they may find it necessary to keep telling about what happened to them, as if they are trying to make sense of chaos and disorder in their life.

CONNECT

1. What story in your life keeps playing over in your mind, or is hard to make sense of?
2. Is there someone in your life who is safe to tell a portion of your painful story?
3. What signs of God's power can you see that remind you of his care?

DIG DEEPER

Psalm 62:8 (NIV) reminds us that we can tell God our complete story even when it is hard to tell another human. Consider how you can write out or otherwise express your pain to God.

Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

DAY FOUR

GOD SENDS ELIJAH ON A NEW MISSION

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 19:15–18

FOCUS

Reflect on today's reading using these questions.

1. What are some of the feelings Elijah may have had when given this new mission?
2. Where is God sending Elijah now? Where do Queen Jezebel and Ahab fit?

DEVOTION

In today's reading, God gives Elijah a new ministry. He is to find helpers to do the work that Elijah has felt he had to do all by himself. And notice how God gently reminds Elijah that he is not, in fact, alone. There are seven thousand righteous who have not submitted to Baal.

Elijah has been the face of God's power to the people of Israel. In this new mission, he is to pass the baton of leadership. Did Elijah feel honored? Supported? Demoted? The text does not tell us.

Most new missions in life can leave us a little disoriented. In God's care for Elijah, God does provide him with a helper and successor. It is a reminder that "Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him." (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 GNT)

God also lets Elijah know that he will not allow injustice to continue. The harm that has happened to Elijah and faithful Israel will be addressed. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel will meet their end and be forgotten. Meanwhile, Elijah is to anoint new kings, even beyond the land of Israel, who will carry out God's purposes.

CONNECT

1. What injustice have you experienced in your life where it feels like evil is winning?
2. What have you felt when one difficult task ends in success or failure and you have a new task ahead of you?
3. Are you being called to a new mission in life? Who might God be pointing out as a helper or successor for you?

DIG DEEPER

Psalm 54 (GNT) is a prayer for protection from enemies. If you are feeling attacked, considering praying through this psalm.

Save me by your power, O God;
set me free by your might!

² Hear my prayer, O God;
listen to my words!

³ Proud people are coming to attack me;
cruel people are trying to kill me—
those who do not care about God.

⁴ But God is my helper.
The Lord is my defender.

⁵ May God use their own evil to punish my
enemies.

He will destroy them because he is faithful.

⁶ I will gladly offer you a sacrifice, O LORD;
I will give you thanks
because you are good.

⁷ You have rescued me from all my troubles,
and I have seen my enemies defeated.

DAY FIVE

ELIJAH GETS A HELPER

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 19:19–21

FOCUS

Reflect on today's reading using these questions.

1. What might Elijah have felt when he was joined by Elisha?
2. What does Elisha need to leave behind to follow God's call?

DEVOTION

God was not put off by Elijah's exhaustion, panic, fear, or despair. He did not respond to his prophet with anger or rebuke. Instead, he provided a helper, someone to carry on Elijah's work into the future.

This chapter ends with Elijah finding Elisha and asking him to join him in his new ministry from God. Elisha agrees and signifies his willingness to leave his current life by killing, cooking, and eating the farm animals he was using for work. Elijah and Elisha work together until God takes Elijah up to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2) and Elisha continues the work of being God's prophet.

CONNECT

1. Have you left behind parts of your past to respond to a call from God?
2. Have you ever felt that God was finished with you because of an experience of fear and despair?
3. What have you felt when you had someone to help you with a difficult task?
4. How might this chapter encourage you as you process a significant hardship, trauma, or transition in your life?

DIG DEEPER

Psalm 30 is a psalm of praise thanking God for raising the writer out of a pit.

Read verses 1–3, 7–8, and 11–12.

I praise you, LORD, because you have saved me
and kept my enemies from gloating over me.

² I cried to you for help, O LORD my God,
and you healed me;

³ you kept me from the grave...

⁷ You were good to me, LORD;
you protected me like a mountain fortress.

But then you hid yourself from me,
and I was afraid.

⁸ I called to you, LORD;
I begged for your help ..

¹¹ You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance;
you have taken away my sorrow
and surrounded me with joy.

¹² So I will not be silent;
I will sing praise to you.

LORD, you are my God;
I will give you thanks forever.

Was this plan helpful?

We adapted this plan from
the **Restoring Hope Bible**
(American Bible Society, 2022).

Here are some ideas
for next steps in your journey.

- > **For further reflection:** Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are the same mountain, and Moses also fasts there for 40 days (see Deuteronomy 9:8–10). Read 1 Kings 19 again and compare with Exodus 33:12–34:18.
- > **Visit traumahealinginstitute.org** for more information and helpful program resources.



Trauma Healing
INSTITUTE



AMERICAN
BIBLE
SOCIETY