

## Re-commissioning Elijah

### 1 Kings 19:15-18

1 Kings 19:15-18 – *“Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*”

#### Background Notes

We’ve seen Elijah at his best - confronting Ahab, confronting the prophets of Baal, walking by faith in the strength of the Lord. But we’ve also seen Elijah at his worst - running in fear from Queen Jezebel, hiding in a cave at Mount Sinai, and then (of all things) answering God’s question with a self-centered, bitter complaint! Even after God had graciously taken care of him and provided for him as he was running away - and even after God had graciously given object lessons to teach him.

In verse 13, it seems that Elijah was moving in the right direction, even though he gave the same self-centered response. In essence, Elijah replied to God like this: “Lord I’ve been zealous for You. I’ve been faithful. Everyone else has forsaken You, but I’ve been right on. I’m doing the job, but nobody cares about me. I’m the only believer left - and they’re seeking to kill me too!” Even though this was a self-centered response, he seemed to be moving in the right direction, because he responded to the “still, small voice” or the gentle whispering of God. And he began to show a reverent attitude by wrapping his face in his cloak, and coming out of the cave to listen to the Lord.

So God graciously gave Elijah the benefit of the doubt, and verses 15-18 God re-commissioned His servant Elijah.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. God graciously restores His servants.

Verse 15: *“Then the Lord said to him: “Go, return.”* That was a renewed commission from the Lord. The fact that God re-commissioned Elijah shows that he was restored to his walk of faith with the Lord. God graciously restores His servants!

Some commentaries say that Elijah was fully restored to his walk with the Lord, but not fully restored to his place of service. Why? Because Elisha is about to replace him. Well, that may be so. However, I still think a case could be

made that Elijah was not set aside from his position of service, because God definitely re-commissioned him. And we know that God continued to use Elijah, as we'll see in the chapters to come.

If Elijah was indeed fully restored and fully re-commissioned, then the answers that God gave in verses 15-17 are answers to questions that were in Elijah's mind. Look back at verse 14. Elijah had told God that Israel had forsaken the covenant, torn down the altars, and killed the prophets. He said this in an accusing tone of voice. "What are doing about this, God? Everybody's forsaking You! I'm the only one left."

Well, God answered that question. Basically He said, "Elijah, you're going to anoint Hazael as the next king of Syria, and he is the one who will attack Israel. Many of the ungodly idolatrous Israelis, people you want to see judged, will be killed. They'll get the ax when Hazael from Syria comes down and attacks Israel."

But Elijah still wanted to know, "Why are Ahab and Jezebel are still in power?" The Lord answered that question. Elijah was to anoint Jehu as the next king of Israel. Jehu would replace wicked King Ahab, and he would be the means of getting rid of wicked Queen Jezebel. Furthermore, Jehu would wipe out all the remaining prophets of Baal.

Elijah carried out these anointings by having his new servant Elisha direct this operation. (Read about that in 2 Kings 8 and 9.) But now Elijah was to appoint Elisha (v16). Elisha, the son of Shaphat, was the man who would take the Elijah's place as prophet in the years to come. A transition was coming.

But we do need to explain what is meant at the end of verse 17: "*It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.*" What does that mean? Did Elisha actually kill anyone? If you want to take this literally, you could say that under Elisha's ministry this prophecy was literally fulfilled by certain events that took place under Elisha's ministry. For example: in 2 Kings 2, about 42 teenagers who mocked Elisha were mauled by two female bears – so some killing related to Elisha went on there. Also, in 2 Kings 8, Elisha pronounced that a famine would come on the land - a famine of discipline from the Lord, and many people died at that time. So we could the idea of Elisha killing literally.

But many commentators take the reference to Elisha in verse 17 figuratively. They take it in the sense of spiritual judgment. In Hosea 6:5 God said that He would have to judge the northern kingdom of Israel, and how He would carry out that judgment. Hosea 6:5 - "*Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth.*" So slain through the prophets, you see, could be taken in a figurative way.

One more question was answered here for Elijah. Elijah had wrongly stated that he was "the only one left" in Israel. He said he was the only one still serving the Lord. "What about that God? I'm the only one." How did God answer that complaint? In verse 18 God told him, "No Elijah, I still have 7000 followers who have not bowed down to Baal, and mouths that have not kissed Baal's image.!"

So here's the point. Every question that Elijah raised was answered by God - even though Elijah didn't ask the questions with a proper attitude. (Do we always have a humble, reverent attitude when we question God about what is happening in our lives?) Yet what grace and patience we see in God's restoration of His servant! God answered every question that Elijah had!

Back again to the question of whether Elijah was fully re-commissioned or partially re-commissioned. We can't say for sure, but he certainly was fully restored to fellowship with the Lord. In His love and grace, God patiently restores His servants. If you have lapsed in your faith in any way, or if you have failed the Lord in some way, you can be sure that God is willing to graciously restore you. God graciously restores His servants!

## **2. God uses unbelievers to accomplish His purposes.**

In this passage we learn that God was about to use two unbelievers to punish and discipline His people, Israel. He would use Hazael, a pagan Syrian king, and He would use Jehu, an ungodly and ruthless king of Israel, to accomplish His purposes.

God can use unbelievers to accomplish His purposes, then and today. God may use unbelievers in your life for His purposes. God may use an unbelieving teacher. God may use an unbelieving fellow worker. God may use an unbelieving boss to accomplish His purposes. In the past, God has done important things in my life through some of my unbelieving godless bosses. God used them - in no uncertain terms - to speak to me about things that needed to be learned or corrected in my life. God may use unbelievers to accomplish His purpose. In fact, He can use any means to accomplish His ultimate purpose in the lives of believers - to make us more like our Savior, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Talk to God about your hang-ups.**

We've seen that Elijah had problems or questions in his faith. He couldn't figure out why God allowed Ahab and Jezebel to remain in power. He wrongly thought that God was allowing all believers to be killed. He thought he was left alone, as the only true believer in Israel. He had real and serious hang-ups - but at least he talked to God about them! He should have had a better attitude, but at least he brought his problems before God. And he did begin show some reverence as he voiced his hang-ups to God.

And guess what? God answered! God graciously answered. It's a great encouragement for us! James 1:5 says, "*If anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.*" That certainly includes wisdom to solve our problems in faith. Bring your questions and problems to God. Talk to God about them.

Do you have any hang-ups right now? You can't exactly figure out what God is doing in the world or in your life? Talk to God about your hang-ups. Don't come with an irreverent attitude, faithless attitude. But if you honestly have a serious problem in your faith, talk to God about it. Maybe it's something that God is doing or not doing in the world, or in your life. Well, talk to God about it!

## 2. Are you a member of the "Secret 7000" club?

The Lord had to tell Elijah that there were still believers in the northern kingdom. *"Seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him"* (v18). But Elijah didn't know about them. Why not? Because they were secret believers. They were afraid to publicly identify with Elijah. Are you a secret believer? Are you a member of the "Secret 7000" club? This time next year, will you admit, "I made it through a whole year and nobody figured out I was a Christian."

There's good news and bad news here. The good news is that God knew about the 7000. Even though they were secret believers, unwilling to publicly testify, unwilling to publicly identify with Elijah, they were there. And God knew them and recognized them. And God took note of that they were there - not just the number, and not just that they believed in their heart. At least they put their true faith into practice when they refused to the knee to Baal. They didn't fake it. They were believers in the one true God of Israel, and at least made a true commitment. They did not bow the knee to Baal, or worship any images of Baal.

This should be an encouragement. If you're a secret believer, if you're a member of the "Secret 7000" club, God knows your heart. God takes note of whatever evidence of faith exists in your life. God knows that you're a true believer. But the sad news, of course, is that you're not sharing Christ with a world that so desperately needs Him. Elijah needed the support and testimony of these 7,000 believers! But they were silent.

Are you a member of the "Secret 7000" club? Your public testimony is needed! Not only in your church or a Christian school or camp, where it's easy, but back in your neighborhood, on your job, on your secular school or college campus.

I'm sure you've heard this convicting question before (maybe even from me): "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Or are you a member of the "Secret 7000" club?