

## Friday February 26

## 1 Kings 19:1-18 – food for the journey

- 1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.
- 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”
- 3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,
- 4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”
- 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”
- 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.
- 7 The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.”
- 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.
- 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”
- 10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”
- 11 The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.
- 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.
- 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”
- 14 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”
- 15 The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.
- 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.
- 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.
- 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

Last December we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary. We had great plans for it. We were looking forward to being with our family in Yorkshire, going out for a celebration meal together in a nice restaurant somewhere: there’s a rather good one near the Humber Bridge that we’ve been to several times.

Alas, the plans came to nothing. We wracked our brains: how *are* we going to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary, just the two of us in splendid isolation? We hunted on line and found a local restaurant doing takeaways; we phoned up to order the food, collected it, drove it home, made sure the oven got the food really hot again, dished it out onto our plates, sat down together at the dining room table and, I'm happy to say, enjoyed it all. Special occasions often involve good food and good company; it might be a birthday, an anniversary, Christmas, or a summer holiday.

And sometimes you need some good food to revive you. That's what happened with Elijah. The First Book of Kings 19 in the Old Testament tells the story of him fleeing for his life from the pagan queen Jezebel. Crossing swords with her has been too much for him; he's exhausted, he's fearful, he's all alone and he thinks that nothing he's done for his God has achieved anything. "I have had enough, LORD," he says. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

But at least he can still be honest with God about how he's feeling: no pretence, no forced cheerfulness. What does God do: give him a good telling off? No. Elijah falls asleep in the desert where he has fled, and when he wakes up, there's food for him to eat. Where did it come from? We aren't told and we'll not try guessing. He eats, more sleep, then more food waiting for him. "Get up and eat," God says, "for the journey is too much for you." Elijah has to go on a long journey to meet with God and get his instructions about taking up his ministry again.

It was food that made all the difference for Elijah when things were at their worst. So if today – or some other day – is the day when it all gets too much for you, do what he did and talk to God about it. But even if, in the words of a former Downing Street spin doctor, you don't 'do God', don't forget the food. It would be so easy to say to yourself that you really can't be bothered to fix yourself anything. But that's just the day when it's important to get something you really enjoy, sit down and get it inside you. This could be the first step on your road back.