

## ARE YOU HEARING THE STILL SMALL VOICE?

No “intro” this morning—and no alliterated outline 😊! Not sure, but that might be a first for me! I’m going to do something else I don’t think *I’ve ever done before*—read an extended portion of Scripture *without commenting* on it while reading. At least, that is what I’m going to *try* to do 😊!

Take your Bibles and turn to I Kings 18. In just a few minutes, I’m going to read to you the account of Elijah fleeing for his life from wicked Queen Jezebel as found in chapter 19. Before I do, though, I want to give you some background of what happened before this.

### **BACKGROUND**

The 12 tribes of the nation of Israel were a united kingdom under their first king—Saul—as well as under the next two kings—David and Solomon. During the reign of Solomon’s son, the kingdom split into two parts—the northern and southern kingdoms.

--The northern kingdom was made up of 10 tribes and was often referred to as Israel.

--The southern kingdom was made up of 2 tribes and was often called Judah.

King Ahab was king of the *northern kingdom* from approximately 874 BC to 853 BC. He was a wicked, idolatrous king who married an equally wicked woman named Jezebel. They had totally forsaken God and “idol worship” was the law of the land.

Just prior to what I’m going to read to you in I Kings 19, there had been a “show-down” on Mount Carmel between two sides. On *one side* was God’s prophet Elijah. On the *other side* was 450 prophets of Baal—and 400 prophets of the groves that sat at Jezebel’s table. We see that in I Kings 18:19.

Humanly speaking, it was a very lop-sided contest—1 against 850! But the contest was not a *physical fight* between 1 man and 850 prophets—it was between the *One and only true* God and helpless, lifeless idols! Here, in the words of Elijah, are the “ground rules” of the contest. Please follow along as I read I Kings 18:22-24.

What happened? Elijah gave the prophets of Baal all day to beg their lifeless idols to start a fire and burn the sacrifice. Nothing happened, of course, so then it was Elijah’s—actually, God’s—turn.

Now follow along as I read I Kings 18:36-40. So there you have *the context*. What I’m going to do now is pray, then we’ll dig into chapter 19.

As mentioned in my “non-intro” intro, I’m now going to read a good portion of I Kings 19. After I’m done doing that, I want to focus the remainder of our time on some *timeless truths* and how those truths can be a blessing to us.

### **1. God is often the most tender when we deserve it the least (vs 4-7)**

Think about the picture here before us. God had shown everyone on Mount Carmel that He *was God*—and that *what Elijah was saying* about God was true!

Elijah had stood unwavering against the false prophets—but was now running for his life because wicked Queen Jezebel said, ‘You are going to be just like the prophets of Baal at this time tomorrow—dead!’

And so he fled to Beer-sheba, a town roughly 100 miles away. It is possible that he traveled all the way there without stopping—meaning he traveled all day and all night. And then—instead of resting in Beer-sheba—he left his servant there and traveled another day’s journey into the wilderness.

Why did he leave his servant behind? Did he do it to protect the life of the servant—or did he leave him behind because he wanted to be alone? We don’t know because we aren’t told!

What we do know, though, is this: he was in the depths of despair! How do we know?

Because in the middle of vs 4... A. The request of the prophet (vs 4)

Vs 4 "...and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life..."

In spite of how God had cared for him *in the past*—and in spite of the demonstration of God's power that he had *just seen on Mt Carmel*—Elijah *was fearful* of this evil woman's threat. I believe he was *also discouraged* because he felt like the only one fighting God's battles. And even *though people said*, "The LORD, He is the God; the LORD, He is the God," they *still did not forsake* their idols and follow God!

And on top of all this, he is now *physically exhausted!*

Let's consider next... B. The response of God (vss 5-7)

What was God's response to Elijah's request for his life to end?

Think of what God's response *could have been!*

--God *could have said*, 'How dare you doubt me! Look at what I've already done for you! Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith!' God didn't say that, though, did He?

--God also *could have said*, 'Quit your whining! Get up; get going—there is work to be done!'

--He didn't say that, either did He? In fact, some would argue God didn't say anything at all!

What was God's response? God *gave him rest—and gave Him food!* In the past, God had fed Elijah using ravens—and the widow of Zarephath. Here it is different, though. In vs 5 it says *an angel* touched him; in vs 7 it says, "an angel of the LORD." In the OT, "an angel of the LORD" is what we often call a "Christophany"—an appearance of Christ *before He came* to Bethlehem as a baby.

I believe that is what happened here. I believe *God Himself came*—and *instead of scolding Elijah*—gave Him rest and food. If that doesn't show the tenderness of God, I don't know what does!

Does God *know* what you are going through? Yes, He does!

Does God *care* about what you are going through? Yes, He does!

Can God *provide for you* when you are going through discouragement and despair?

Yes, He can—and yes, He does! And sometimes that care involves you getting *some rest!*

## **2. God is persistent when it comes to teaching us**

I'm pretty sure I mentioned last week how persistent God is in *teaching*—and *reteaching*—us the things that He *wants us to learn*—and things we should *already know!* I believe we see that quite a bit in this passage. So what is God teaching—and reteaching—Elijah?

A. We need God's strength (vss 7-8)

Notice again the end verse 7 "...because the journey is too great for thee." We are so slow to realize that sometimes. God doesn't want us to go in our *own strength*—He wants us to *depend on His!* Now vs 8.

Think about that: Elijah had gone a day and a night in his *own strength* and became exhausted—but goes 40 days and 40 nights on the two meals *God provided* for him!

B. We need to sense God's presence (vss 8-9)

I find it quite interesting to notice that after God gave Elijah food and rest, He didn't immediately send him back to Jezebel. Where did God send him? On a journey—for 40 days and 40 nights—to Mount Horeb!

The journey from Beer-sheba unto Horeb, the mount of God, is a long one—roughly 200 miles! But...it *wouldn't have taken* 40 days to get there. Barnes suggests it would have taken only 6 or 7.

So why *did it* take 40 days—and why *go to Horeb* instead of back to the nation of Israel?

Since the Bible doesn't *say* why God sent Elijah to Horeb—and why it took so long—we *can't be dogmatic* as to why. But here are some guesses.

### i. The significance of 40 days and 40 nights

Think about the significance of 40 days and 40 nights.

--Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai talking to God and receiving the 10 Commandments for how long?

40 days and 40 nights!

--Moses broke the tablets of stone with the 10 Commandments and went back up Mt Sinai a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

How long was Moses on the mountain this time? The same—40 days and 40 nights!

--How long did the nation of Israel wander in the wilderness? 40 years—**not** days and nights!

Is it possible that God was giving Elijah a “wandering in the wilderness” kind of experience to remind him how He had dealt with His people as a nation? The generation that wandered are the ones who were banned from entering the Promised Land because of **their unbelief**. Maybe—just maybe—God was using those 40 days to work on Elijah about his **unbelief**.

More important than the length of time for the journey—in my opinion, anyway—is the **place** God was sending Elijah.

### ii. The significance of Horeb

**First**, Mount Horeb is the place where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

**Exodus 3:1-2** “Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, **even to Horeb**.<sup>2</sup> And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”

**Second**, Mount Horeb is also known as **Mount Sinai**. Mount Sinai is the place where Moses met God and received the Ten Commandments...and the rest of the law...and the instructions for the sacrificial system...and the instructions for the tabernacle.

In other words, Mount Sinai is often considered the **birthplace of the nation** of Israel!

**Here’s a third**. What were the people doing when Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God? **Making a golden calf** and proclaiming, ‘These be the gods that brought us out of Egypt!’ After this, God told Moses (Ex 33:3) that He would **no longer go with them** but would send an angel instead.

Moses insisted that God go with them, then asked “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.” In other words, ‘I want to see you, God!’

Notice God’s response in **Exodus 33:20-22** “And He said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.<sup>21</sup> And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:<sup>22</sup> And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:”

Some commentators suggest that God **was sending Elijah** to stand in the very same place He had sent Moses to stand hundreds of years earlier! It was as if God was saying to Elijah,

--‘Remember the beginning of our nation and how I called the people out of Egypt and made them mine!’ --‘Remember how Moses met me here—and saw my glory!’

--‘And now I am bringing you here to remind you who I am!’

**First**, God was teaching Elijah that he needed God’s strength. **Second**, God was teaching Elijah how much he needed to sense God’s presence.

**Third**, C. We need to remember that God works in small things as well as the large (vss 9-14)

I believe that is the message that God is trying to teach Elijah—and us—in verses 9-14.

**Vs 9:** “And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there, and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He [God] said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?”

Interesting question, isn’t it—especially considering who it **is from**!

--As near as we can tell, Elijah was in **this place** because **God had brought** him there!

--Not only that, since God knows everything, He **knew** why Elijah was there!

So **why** did God ask the question? Again, we are not told but I believe it was because God wanted Elijah **to evaluate** what he was doing—and **why he was** doing it—then explain it to God.

What was Elijah's response? Vs 10 "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Was God happy with Elijah's answer? Probably not! Why do I say that? Because God asks the **exact same question** again in vs 13! But before asking the question a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, God sends a **great and strong wind**...then an **earthquake**...then a **fire**—but God was not "in them."

Lastly, we see in vs 12 that God speaks to Elijah in a **still small voice**. Barnes put it like this: "a sound of soft stillness." Elijah recognizes God's voice in the stillness and wraps his face with his mantle—a sign of reverence. God asks the same question He had asked in verse 9—"What doest thou here, Elijah?"—and Elijah gives the same answer in vs 14 that he had given in vs 10!

I'm of the opinion that because Elijah gave the same answer, he still wasn't "getting" what God was trying to show him! Elijah was about "fire coming down from heaven"! He saw that on Mount Carmel—and he called fire down on "captains of fifty" that were trying to capture him not long after this!

But God's work is not always about **great and strong winds** that can tear mountains. It is not always manifested **by earthquakes and fires**. Sometimes God's work is **small and seemingly insignificant**. In Elijah's mind, he was the only one left that was serving God.

God corrected that thinking, though, by reminding Elijah in vs 18 that He had 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. It was as if God was saying to Elijah, 'Just because they aren't on the top of Mount Carmel taking on the prophets of Baal, it doesn't mean they aren't out there.'

A good reminder for us. It is God's church...and God's work...and God's world. We don't always know the big picture, but we need to remain confident that God has everything under control—and that there are others that are faithful to Him besides us!

#### D. Sometimes the remedy for discouragement is to get to work! (vs 18)

Elijah was discouraged—which was probably an understatement since he said he wanted to die! God cared for his **physical needs** of food and rest, strengthened him, brought Him to the place of His presence and showed him who He was, put him to work, and reminded him that there were others serving God, too! I could be wrong, but it seems to me that God put Elijah back to work before he correctly answered the question "What doest thou here?"

#### Lastly, E. We need to be still to hear a still small voice

Although maybe not one of the main lessons from the passage, it is true nonetheless—you **won't hear** a still small voice if you don't **take time** to be still! Elijah had to go through some "hardship;" some "sacrifice" to get to the place where he would quietly listen to God.

We obviously don't have to **travel a great distance** to be in the presence of God, but there are things we need to do to foster a sense of His presence.

--We need to be **awake...and alert...and expectant**.

--We need to **go to a place** where we can be free from distractions.

--We need to **go at a time** when we are not rushed.

--We need to be **honest and humble** when we come to Him. I'm not sure that Elijah was being honest with God. His answer to "What doest thou here, Elijah" probably **should have been**—"I'm doubting you, God, that's why I fled for my life!" Isn't it strange that we're so reluctant to tell God what He already knows?

--And we need to be listening for Him to speak to us—and not so eager for us to do all the talking!

**Psalm 4:4** "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."

What about you? Do you make time to be still before God so you can hear His voice—or do you only look for Him in the big and loud and powerful things like Elijah did? In James 5, Elijah is held up as a model of prayer. I can't help but think Elijah's prayer-life was slipping at this time, too!

One last word on Elijah. He “recovered,” if I can use that word. In other words, God used him again. Why do I say that? Because in Matthew 17, Jesus was on a mountain with Peter, James, and John when Jesus face shined like the sun and His raiment was as white a light. Guess who appeared? Moses and Elijah!

So what would God have us do in light of His word?

1. One good thing would be to answer the question that God asked Elijah—twice! What was the question?

“What doest thou here, Elijah?”

--'What are you doing in the place that I have you?’

--Are you doing what I want—or what you want?

--Are you following my plan—or your plan?

2. Second, I believe we ought to evaluate our prayer life. Do you have a consistent, heart-to-heart quiet time with God? We **need** time in God’s presence—and God desires we come into His presence—and yet we don’t consider it as important as we should.

3. Even though this wasn’t a salvation message per se, I believe God would have us consider our **eternal destiny**.

--What answer will you give to God when He asks this: 'What are you doing in the world I have created?’

--Here’s a question that is even more sober: ‘Why do you remain standing on the brink of hell when you could be certain of heaven?’