

1 Kings 19:9-21

Elijah on Mt. Horeb and the Calling of Elisha

We find the prophet Elijah at the lowest point in his life. He had seen a miraculous defeat of the prophets of Baal and the ending of the drought, but his expectations of a national return to God was apparently not happening. When Queen Jezebel threatens to kill him, he flees.

After 40 days travel Elijah arrives at Mt. Sinai or Horeb,

1 Kings 19:9 - "And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?"

It says "the cave" using the definite article, and the rabbis assume this is the "cleft of the rock" where Moses had talked with God.

- **Exodus 33:22** - " 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:"

Like Abraham, Elijah is not afraid to argue and complain to the Lord. He needed to unload what was burdening his heart. God opens the conversation:

1 Kings 19:10 - "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."

Elijah starts by wondering how a faithful servant of God should be made to suffer and fear for his life. He felt isolated and alone.

To answer Elijah's complaint, God was going to demonstrate a truth - that God's ways are not what we expect. His strength is perfected in our weakness. He would enter the world as a vulnerable baby in Jesus. His victory on the cross would look like defeat.

1 Kings 19:11 - "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:"

Sometimes God works with fire and fury like He did on Mt. Carmel. But at other times, his work is hidden, and cloaked in weakness. Moses' experience on Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke, thunder and fire and earthquake.

- **Exodus 19:16** - "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet

exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled."

Elijah's experience was a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:12-13 - "And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"

God was trying to tell him something important.

- **Zechariah 4:6** - "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

In effect, God spoke to him in a whisper. That's really how the Spirit speaks to our heart to bring us to Him.

This whole story is very relevant for us today. Our society does not share a common arbiter of truth. Like Jezebel, people can dismiss anything, even what normally would confirm truth or act as proof. Superstition is powerful. Miracles can be counterfeited by special effects or Artificial Intelligence. "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible" (**Matthew 24:24**). Mt. Carmel? That could have been a "deep fake." Ecstatic experiences? Just take a psychoactive drug and get the same feeling.

The only thing that can't be faked is the still small voice of God speaking to our hearts. That packs a spiritual punch that leads to repentance.

Once you pour water over the sacrifice, quenching all natural possibilities, then the miracle must be from God.

- **Zechariah 4:10** - "For who hath despised the day of small things?"

When Elijah hears that whisper, he repeats his complaint exactly as before:

1 Kings 19:14 - "And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because 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."

Instead of addressing Elijah's complaint directly, God ignores it and gives him a mission, a task to get him out of all the introspection.

1 Kings 19:15-17 - "And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that

escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

God did have a plan, and Elijah had a big role to play. Lots of action, the apparent end of the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, a big shakeup involving several nations.

Then he speaks to Elijah's feeling of isolation, almost as an afterthought: "You're not alone!"

1 Kings 19:18 - "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

Things are not as they seem, so don't trust your senses, trust God. This is the meaning of Elijah wrapping his face in his mantle. Pulling his mantle over his head signifies humility facing the fear and dread of the presence of God, but also his eyesight and hearing are blocked. Sensory information is quenched so he can hear the voice of the Spirit.

Some commentators explain that the 7,000 were not converted by the miracles or displays of power but rather by the steady perseverance of Elijah and the small faithfulness of people like Obadiah sheltering the prophets.

The Call of Elisha

1 Kings 19:19 - "So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him."

i.e. Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha in the same way he wrapped his own face in it on Horeb. Elisha had to see this truth too. We must all wrap our faces and pull the mantle over our heads if we want to prophecy.

Elijah needed a companion, and Elisha would be that for him. He also needed hope, and Elisha would ensure his work would continue, and ultimately idolatry would be overthrown.

Elijah's mantle was a rough cloak made of skin with the hair still on it. The rough garment would continue to be the mark of a prophet until John the Baptist.

1 Kings 19:20 - "And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?"

Or, "remember what I have done to you" i.e. don't delay, knowing the importance of what that mantle means - the office of prophet.

Similar to Jesus' words, but more stringent because of who Jesus was:

"Another of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father. ' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'" (**Matthew 8:21-22**).

The call of always Jesus demands radical, prompt obedience.

When Jesus called the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee, they immediately left their nets to follow his call to be “fishers of men.” By preaching they would “catch” humans in the net of the gospel and pull them from spiritual death into life in the kingdom.

Similarly, as a prophet, Elijah would leave his 12 oxen to follow a call to “plow” as Elijah did - with his powerful and sometimes harsh words, digging furrows in the hard ground of the human mind, causing repentance and making the soil capable of receiving the seed.

To plow is the Hebrew word *Charash*, which also means to carve or engrave something. Jeremiah uses the word to show how Israel’s sin is “engraven” on their hearts.

- **Jeremiah 17:1** - “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven (*charash* - plowed) upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars.”

The “plowing” of the prophets’ words either write the sin or expose what is already written on the heart, to hopefully turn us toward repentance.

1 Kings 19:21 - "And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

Elisha's old life is literally transformed, the yoke became the fire that cooked the oxen that became food for the people.