

Old Testament Characters: Elijah – Encountering God

Goldstone Church – 12-Jun-16 10:30am

1 Kings 19:3-18

Introduction

This is the second of two weeks looking at the life of one of the most significant prophets: Elijah. This passage tells of the occasion when Elijah met with God.

1. **WHEN** does Elijah encounter God (v.3)

What is happening in Elijah's life when he encounters God? It is not good news. When Elijah met and encountered God, he was...

- a) **Fugitive.** Elijah was running for his life, and in serious physical danger.
- b) **Jobless.** Elijah had no audience, so was unemployed.
- c) **Homeless.** Elijah ran away into the desert and is sleeping rough, under a tree.
- d) **Alone.** Elijah left the servant in Beersheba.

Poster: "The biggest disease known to mankind is Loneliness"

Elijah is in the tough and troubled parts of life.

Compare this discouraging scenario with the 1 Kings 18:37-38; the situation is completely different. Here, Elijah is the centre of attention. The people see the power of God, and have to acknowledge that Elijah is a great prophet and great man of God.

But now we have a very different Elijah. From being on a spiritual high, he's now depressed - and even suicidal. Yet at that deepest and darkest point, God speaks; Elijah encounters God.

Today, God is saying, even if you are going through a dark, dark valley, God knows all about you – and is seeking to meet with you.

2. **WHERE** did Elijah encounter God (v.8)

This may seem a little obvious, as v.8b says that Elijah travelled to "*Horeb, the mountain of God*". Furthermore, Elijah spent a night in a cave on Mount Horeb, and God's conversation with Elijah was "*on the mountain*" (v.11).

However, some Bible scholars suggest that Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are different names for the *same* place. Others suggest that they were different locations. It's not clear-cut either way.

Nevertheless, if Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are the same place, then Elijah is meeting God at the same location where the Israelites received 10 Commandments. On that occasion, (Exodus 19:9), God tells Moses that He will come down in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear God speak. Exodus 19:16 says there was "*thunder and lightening, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.*" This sounds similar to the wind and earthquake and fire (lightening) that Elijah experienced.

But we need to be careful *not* to focus too much on exact geographical locations, otherwise we may stray to the incorrect belief that God can only be found at specific places. But the Bible is very clear – God is everywhere. God is Omnipresent.

God says, “I fill heaven and earth.” (Jeremiah 23:24)

God declares that he “knows the laws of the heavens.” (Job 38:33)

And when we pray in secret, the unseen Father will see us and hear us. (Matthew 6:6)

In Elijah’s time, it was common practice for the Israelites to go on a pilgrimage, especially to the Temple. In Jesus’ time, Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate holy festivals. Nevertheless, God is still inviting us to meet with Him.

“*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Today, God is inviting us come to a place – either literally or spiritually – come to a place and focus our hearts on who God is.

3. **WHAT** happened when Elijah encountered God (v.11-13)

1 Kings 19:11-13a provides a great insight into God’s character. The way that God interacts with Elijah on Mount Horeb shows us something of who God is and what He is like.

a) **God is not Lifeless.**

- i. **Not in the Wind** (v.11). Our God is not the “Wind God”. Our God regulates and controls the wind!
- ii. **Not in the Earthquake** (v.11). Our God is not the “Earthquake God”. Our God regulates and controls the earthquake!
- iii. **Not in the Fire** (v.12). Our God is not the “Fire God”. Our God regulates and controls the fire!

b) **God is Active.**

God expresses His life and vibrancy by ...whispering.

A whisper is:

- i. **Personal & Private.** A whisper is used between 2 people. It’s a private message from the whisperer, to the listener.
- ii. **Loving & Relational.** A whisper is used between a couple. It’s a sign of affection and intimacy between the whisperer, to the listener.
- iii. **Gentle & Restful.** A whisper is soft and peaceful. Through the sound, the whisperer is expressing tenderness and compassion.
- iv. **Close Proximity.** Whispers work best when people are near to each other. That nearness intensifies the sense of love and gentleness between them.

Our God is not Lifeless – He is very much alive and active. Instead of using the wind, earthquake, or even fire, God shows His involvement in our daily lives - through a gentle whisper.

God wants to speak to each one of us today – not in, or through, the fireworks of life, but gently, intimately, closely and personally. The relationship of the whisper is as important as the content of the message.

CONCLUSION

We also have to ask, Why? Why did God want to meet with Elijah?
And why does God want us to have an encounter with Him today?

- If all God wanted to do, was to cheer up Elijah in his depression, then that downgrades God to just a social worker with a case load.
- If all God wanted to do, was to give new assignments to Elijah, then that downgrades God to just an employer with a business plan.
- If all God wanted to do, was to show Elijah his earth-shaking power, then that downgrades God to just a show off with a big ego.

Instead, the reason why God wanted to meet with Elijah comes back to the whisper. God wanted to be close, gentle, loving, personal, and relational with Elijah. But that wasn't enough – God wanted to be close to all His creation, so He sent His son, Jesus, into the world. Through what Jesus did on the cross at Calvary, we are free to be close and personal with God.

In the same way that God was whisper-close with Elijah, God wants to be that close, that gentle, that loving, that personal, and that deep in a relationship with each one of us. Through Jesus, He is inviting us with arms open wide.

How will you respond to His invitation?

Amen