

**1-8 BACK TO THE DESERT**

Elijah returns to the gates of Jezreel, running ahead of Ahab, to find Jezebel waiting for him. After having heard about what he did to the prophets of Baal, Jezebel sends him a death threat. And so Elijah runs for his life once more, to Beersheba, far to the south.

Elijah is beyond frustrated with his predicament. His ministry appears to have been no better than any of the prophets that have gone before him. And so he asks to die. A century later, Jonah will give us a reverse image of Elijah's attitude (Jonah 4:8). But notice Elijah's resilience. While it apparently takes nothing for the Israelites to go from serving God to serving Jezebel once again, it just takes two meals and a nap for Elijah to be ready to head back into the desert. Here he goes forty days and forty nights, fasting all the way, just as Jesus would (Mt. 4:1). Now Elijah is being prepared for something greater than anything he has yet experienced.

**9-12 ELIJAH'S DISCOURAGEMENT AND GOD'S PRESENCE**

Elijah is going to Mt. Horeb, which is another name for Mt. Sinai, where he has one of the strangest encounters in the Old Testament. Now when Jonah was unsure about his mission, he ran from the presence of God. But Elijah, when he gets discouraged, he runs to God's presence, he runs to Mt. Sinai. Here God renews Elijah's strength by revealing himself to Elijah.

*SEEING GOD*

There is a theological puzzle here. First, we know that God is invisible. We are told this throughout Scripture (1 Tim. 1:17, 6:16). There are two parts to our inability to see God.

1. God is spirit and therefore he cannot be seen by human eyes (John 4:24, Luke 24:39). Jesus was God the Son, who became a man so that he could inhabit this physical world in a way that he could reveal God to us (Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:15, John 1:18, 14:9).
2. God's glorious holiness is of such an intensity that standing before God and beholding him in all his goodness would destroy us (Ex. 33:20, Is. 6:5).

*THEOPHANIES*

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many places where God appeared to men. He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:8-10). He appeared to Abraham a number of times (Gen. 12:7, 17:1, 18:1-2). He appeared to Isaac (Gen. 26:2, 24), Jacob (Gen. 28:13, 32:1-2, 24, 28-29, 35:9, 48:3), Moses (Ex. 3:2, 24:9-11, Num. 12:6-8), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21), Manoah (Jud. 13:15-23), David (2 Chron. 3:1), and Solomon (1 Kings 3:5, 9:2, 2 Chron. 7:12). The theological term for these is – theophany. These are moments when God the Son, before his incarnation, took on the form of a man to speak with men. It was God that they were speaking to. But he was veiled and his glory was hidden.

But there a couple of moments in the Old Testament where something a bit stronger happens, where a much more powerful encounter with the glory of God happens. One would be when Moses was on Mt. Sinai. Moses asked if he could see God's glory. God places Moses in a cleft of the rock and causes his glory to pass by with his hand covering Moses. He then pulls away his hand and allows Moses to see his back, because no one can see his face and live (Ex. 33:18-23).

The other most memorable example of this kind of encounter would be our text, where Elijah stands in a cave on Mt. Sinai and the Lord passes by. But first there is a wind, then an earthquake, then a fire, and then finally the Lord passes by. We are easily distracted by displays of power. But that is not where God is. If God had been in the fire, wouldn't everything have been fixed on Mt. Carmel? God's power is in an easy word. The "still, small voice" is such a great phrase, but the Hebrew indicates something even quieter "a small, silent voice."

### **13-18 WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ELIJAH?**

Elijah gives his complaint "It doesn't look like it's working." God corrects him and sends him back out again. But he has to see that God's plans for Israel are larger than just Elijah's generation. The Apostle Paul quotes this section (Rom. 11:3-4). But God answers that a remnant is preserved by grace, preserved by the power of his voice. When we find ourselves tempted to despair, we need to hear God asking us "What are you doing here, \_\_\_\_\_?"

### **19-21 THE CALL OF ELISHA**

Elisha is plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. This is an indication of Elisha's great wealth. Upon receiving his call to follow Elijah, Elisha hesitates for a moment and Elijah confronts him with the question he got from God. Elisha's response of killing the oxen demonstrates that he is now all in.

### **THE VISION OF GOD**

The way that God related to his people in the period of the Old Testament portrayed the distance between God and man. The coming of Christ changed all this so that we now declare the nearness of God. But we should understand that just as the Old Testament situation was a picture, so too we are just picturing a much greater reality. Elijah and Moses's encounters with God were just a faint shadow of the glory that awaits us on the other side of this life. When mortality is swallowed up by immortality, we will come face to face with an incomprehensibly joyful glory. That is what all of this is aiming towards. We live now by faith. But there is a time when faith itself will tear away as the wrapping paper holding a much greater gift (Job 19:25-26, Ps. 17:15, 1 Cor. 13:12-13, 2 Cor. 5:7, 1 John 3:2).