

The story of Elijah - just after Mount Carmel.

Elijah has been standing as the Lord's champion
he has been confronting a daunting foe
Queen Jezebel.

Jezebel is not Israelite - she is a Sidonian
she is a Ba'al worshipper
and she is a force to be reckoned with.

King Ahab, of Israel, has married her.

1 Kings 16.30-31 says of Ahab

*Ahab, son of Omri,
did more evil in the eyes of the Lord
than any of those before him.
He not only considered it trivial
to commit the sins of Jeroboam
son of Nebat,
but he also married Jezebel
daughter of Ethba'al,
king of the Sidonians,
and began to serve Ba'al and worship him.*

Ba'al was the fertility god
god of the harvest and the weather.

But the Lord is the God of all creation
including the harvest and the weather.

So Elijah, the man of God,
whose name means "*The Lord, he is God*"
stands up against Ahab,
and his woman, and her religion.

Elijah flees from Jezebel
Peter remembers the transfiguration

Sunday Next
before Lent

1 Kings 19. 1 - 16
2 Peter 1. 16 - 21

He demonstrates the superiority of God
by calling down a drought for three years.

The Lord says, no rain
see if your priests of Ba'al can over-rule that!
and they fail.

But still the people will not reject Ba'al
and turn back to the Lord.

It is maybe because the Ba'al worship
looks more attractive.

Jezebel is a powerful and alluring woman
she has a wicked charm
and she has a strong army - a secret police
so the people follow the swing in power
and go with the palace.

Eventually Elijah has his big contest.

On Mount Carmel, in the sight of all the people
he has a trial.

God has withheld the rain
but they are not convinced.
So a more spectacular demonstration
is called for.

See whose God can send fire from heaven.
Can Ba'al, the god of the weather
can he send lightning from the sky?
What if the Lord does?
Will the people believe?

So the famous contest takes place.
Two altars on the mountain-side
one for Elijah, the prophet of the Lord
and one for the 450 prophets of Ba'al
and the 400 prophets of Asherah
(the fertility goddess)

So the contest is set - 950 to 1
and all the prophets of Ba'al and Asherah
spend all day praying in a frenzy to their gods,
and there is no fire.

Elijah calls on his God
and fire comes from heaven
burns up Elijah's offering
burns up Elijah's stone altar
burns up the altar and sacrifice
of the prophets of the false gods too.

Elijah's challenge had been
*The god who answers with fire
he is God.*

The people now turn to Elijah's God
and chant:

*The Lord - he is God
The Lord - he is God.*

And the gory bit - they kill the others
all 950 prophets of Ba'al and Asherah
and the blood flows down the mountain.

Elijah's God has won
Elijah is vindicated!
Hurrah!

Except Jezebel doesn't see it that way.

Maybe it wasn't really about gods
it was about power - who rules Israel?

Does Elijah - this loyal prophet of Yahweh?
or does Ahab?
- and more importantly - does Jezebel?

Jezebel still has her armies
and her wrath!

She makes a promise to Elijah -
You have slaughtered all these prophets
who were Jezebel's import from Sidon.

Either Jezebel will make Elijah like them
or she herself will become like them
she makes an oath.

These religious men didn't defeat Elijah
but her soldier men will.

Elijah - what is he thinking and feeling?
what faith has he in the Lord Yahweh
who has just answered with fire from heaven
in a most spectacular way?

Not only did the Lord defeat the 950 prophets
but he now sends a torrential rain storm
after 3 years of drought.

But Elijah looks at Jezebel's strength
her determination, her loyal troops
and he is afraid.

He runs, he hides,
and he asks God to take his life.

It is tempting to criticise Elijah
after all this great demonstration of God's power
still he is afraid of Jezebel,
who is only flesh and blood.

But he has just demonstrated
great faith and courage.

He has just triumphed in a great spiritual battle
against these demonic forces
behind the false gods.

He is physically weak and tired
and for once, he succumbs
to a severe bout of depression!

Even spiritual giants are human
and have their times of weakness and failure.

And the Lord, in his tenderness and compassion
deals with Elijah so gently.

Elijah cries out to the Lord
seated under the broom tree

"I have had enough, Lord.

Take my life.

I am no better than my ancestors."

I feel for the man. - He has had enough.

And the Lord lets him sleep for a while.

After his sleep
and angel wakes him and feeds him.
He eats and drinks, and sleeps a second time.
And the angel wakes him a second time
with more of this miraculous food.
He eats and drinks again
and goes on a journey to Horeb
God's holy mountain
and again, is given shelter and a night's sleep.

Rest - physical nourishment -
rest - physical nourishment
rest - and then an encounter with the Lord God.

And now another well-known passage
the storm, the earthquake, the fire.
But God is in the still small voice.

More important, though, is the conversation
look at the words before all this.

1 Kings 19. 9

*And the word of the Lord came to him:
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

I guess the answer should have been
I came here because you sent for me.
He should have said -
This is your time Lord - you speak.

but Elijah wants to rehearse his own grumbles

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.*

What Elijah needs, is an experience of God.

So The Lord God promises to pass by -
and we get the storm, the earthquake, the fire -
and then the still small voice.

And all this time Elijah has been disobedient.

Are you ever like this?
You are upset, hurt, aggrieved,
and the Lord is willing to put it right
you just need a hug from God
and he says "come over here"
and you stay over there.

How do you receive from God?

By making an act of submission.

What does an act of defiance do?

It keeps God at a distance.

*"Go out and stand on the mountain
in the presence of the Lord"
says the Lord.*

And Elijah stays in the cave.
He nearly misses it.

From inside the cave,
Elijah hears the gentle whisper
which is the voice of God.
(verse 13)

*When Elijah heard it,
he went out
and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

At last!

And the voice asks the same question
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Now in my experience
when you answer God's question
and God just repeats the question
you begin to wonder -
I must have got the answer wrong?
But Elijah gives the same answer.

*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.*

Why was Elijah there?
because The Lord wanted to
talk with him, touch him, re-commission him,
and send him back strengthened.

So God just gets on with it.

Go back - here are some tasks
(which incidentally asserts God's sovereignty
not just over Israel
but over the surrounding nations too)

He points out Elijah's successor - Elisha
which affirms Elijah's ministry - it will continue.

And he corrects Elijah's complaint -

"Only I am left"

*There are still seven thousand in Israel
whose knees have not bowed down to Ba'al
and whose mouths have not kissed him.*

And then we move on to the death of Jezebel
the death of Ahab
and the new ministry of Elisha
and into 2 Kings.

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Now what sort of a God do you see here
in this Old Testament story?

Some would see a blood-thirsty god
who slaughters 950 foreign prophets
and lets their blood flow down the mountain side
like a river.

These were primitive times.

But I see a God who cares for his people
and they are being led astray by false gods
and dominated by corrupt oppressive leaders.

He begins gently
with Elijah, his man, calling the royal court
to turn back to God
but to no effect -

he becomes more persuasive with the drought
to prove his point - He, the Lord, is God.
God of the weather, God of the harvest

But still to no avail.

Finally he demonstrates in a way
that no-one would forget

and the casualties are the ones
who had chosen to serve the foreign gods
even when they were shown
to have no real power.

He is a God who then takes care
of his servant Elijah
and even uses storms and earthquakes
to touch him and build him up.

He is a God who has kept safe
the seven thousand who stayed loyal to him
even in the face of Jezebel's persecution.

He is a God who is in control of history
not just of Israel, but of every land,
and he will bring to pass
his good and loving plans for mankind.

This is the God of the Old Testament!
And I am happy to serve him.

Just to touch briefly on the reading from 1 Peter.

Peter is reflecting on the scriptures particularly the word of the prophets and can we trust them.

Does the Bible contain truth - God's truth?
Or is it, in Peter's words "cleverly invented stories"

He remembers a time, on another mountain, when he and James and John were with Jesus and Jesus was transfigured - his glory became visible.

At that time there also appeared with Jesus two men from the Old Testament - Moses and Elijah.

(They weren't ghosts, or departed spirits visiting earth. just a detail - but the stories of both these men's deaths leads us to guess that they were taken alive to heaven.

On their way from time to eternity they stopped off at that mountain and caught a glimpse of the fulfilment of God's promises to them in their lives. Just as we believe that Abraham was given a glimpse of Calvary on his way to heaven.)

But what Peter is saying is this - we have seen his glory - we are eye-witnesses - we know this God-stuff is real and so we believe the other bits too. Our experience of God authenticates what we read in the scripture.

Elijah had an experience of God, more than once.
And so he believed the whole package.

Meeting with God is a faith-builder that lasts all your life.
And what Peter and the others discovered
was that the God they had met
was the same God of Moses and Elijah.

The Old Testament God is Peter's God, and he is our God.
A God of wrath - a jealous God
because he doesn't want his people led astray
by false gods who will damage their lives.

There are Jezebels today - and false prophets today
who would entice us away from the true and living God.
That is why he sent Jesus
to defeat the powers of evil, that blind us
and enslave us in ungodly ways.

The Old Testament teaches us about God
and it points to Jesus.

The New Testament makes it much clearer -
it helps us to see the truth of the Old.
But the Old still contains truth;
don't be led astray by those who would throw it away.

I am glad to be a servant of the God of Elijah.
He is my hero - and his God is my God.
And that God is good - all the time.

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