

## **ELIJAH'S JOURNEY**

Rev. Dr. Reuben P. Bell

January 30, 2009

**And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? Go back the way you came..."** (I Kings 19:13, 15)

I understand that you are about to embark on a new Journey Program here – stories, sermons and exercises all based on the Word that will bring it to life in your lives, where it counts. There is no better place to go in all the Word, to find a journey like they one in I Kings Chapter 17 to II Kings 2. You have an inspiring few weeks ahead of you.

You see, if we look for journeys in the Word, we do not have to look for long. So many of the great stories, it seems, involve journeys of some kind. One of the best of these is the powerful story of Elijah, mighty man of God. We read parts of this story today, in our lessons. I encourage you to read this whole story, when you have the opportunity; the story of your own life is in it, if you care to find it. Elijah is a mysterious figure, appearing suddenly and briefly; sent by God to eradicate the worship of Baal, the cruel religion of Jezebel, and adopted by her husband Ahab, king of Israel. The Writings tell us that as a prophet he is a teacher of truth (AE 1260:1), and “God spoke through the hand of Elijah” (AC 7619). So his story is well worth considering: Divine truth, right from the source.

These were tough times for Israel, and the Lord raised up a strange and wonderful figure to do His work. Elijah's ministry was a series of journeys. He just sort of “appears, out of nowhere,” in Chapter 17, finds Ahab (a really rotten king of Israel), and proclaims that there will be no rain or dew for several years, or as he tells Ahab, “until I say so.” From this point on, his story is a journey. Let's summarize it, up to Elijah's mystical meeting with the Lord:

After confronting Ahab, the Lord tells him to go and hide in a ravine, by the Brook Cherith, east of the Jordan River. Ravens bring him bread and meat twice daily, and he drinks water from the brook. Ravens.... There are lots of correspondences here, as there are in all these wonderful Old Testament stories. We will look at some of these, a little later.

In the third year of the drought, the Lord tells Elijah to go and present himself again to Ahab (a dangerous thing to do, considering his evil wife Jezebel and the drought which he himself had brought down on Israel). Elijah finds him and arranges a great confrontation on Mt. Carmel: he tells Ahab to bring the 450 prophets of Baal along to meet him there, and the 400 prophets of Asherah too. All of them against one of him.

Then comes the big showdown: “How long will you falter between two opinions?” he asks the people (can you imagine the crowd for this event?). “If the Lord is God follow Him; if Baal is God follow him.” Elijah is there to find out which one is the true God of Israel.

He calls for two bulls for two sacrifices, to be killed and placed on identical altars. They would both pray for fire from heaven – each to his own god – and they would see which one was listening.

So the prophets of Baal prayed, and danced, and shouted, and cut themselves “until the blood flowed,” all day, but no fire came to consume the sacrifice. Elijah wasn’t much help – he made fun of their god: “Maybe he is deep in thought, or busy, or on a journey,” he suggested, “or perhaps he is sleeping.” But no fire. Nothing... all day.

Finally it was Elijah’s turn: First, he doused his altar three times with water. (Imagine the suspense of this moment.) Then, in contrast to the frenzied activity of the prophets of Baal, he simply lifted up his voice and prayed to the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel...” “...let it be

known this day that you are the God in Israel.” And you know the rest: Fire, intense enough to consume the very rocks of the altar, fell from heaven and settled the bet. Can you imagine what it might have been like to be there?

Now Jezebel, unmoved by this demonstration of awesome supernatural power, renewed her vow to kill this man: “So let the gods do to me, and more also,” she said, “if you are not dead by this time tomorrow.”

This was Elijah’s greatest moment. What a victory, for the God of Israel! And what a victory, for His servant, Elijah! His stock was never higher. So what did he do, this mighty man of God? He ran off, into the wilderness. He felt exhausted, discouraged, sorry for himself, and probably more than a little indignant (where was his reward for all this dangerous and difficult work? After all this, it was still business-as-usual with the king, and he was still a wanted man. Where is the justice in this? Here was Elijah on the heels of his greatest triumph, hiding in the wilderness, sleeping under a scruffy little tree, so depressed that he prayed to die! But the Lord had an angel come and feed him instead. (That’s the way prayer works, sometimes; you don’t always get what you want. Usually, whether we like it or not, we get what we need.) Then, having slept, eaten and prayed, he was off, on another journey, forty days deeper into the desert... until he came to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God.

It was here that something remarkable happened to Elijah. He didn't intend to meet the Lord out there. He was hiding, in a cave, when the Lord said to him in a voice he could hear, with his ears, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (Has the Lord ever asked you that same question?) Hearing the expected rationalization (“I have done my best, but everybody is against me; the world is a rotten place, and I am the only good guy left, so I’m hiding out here.”), the

Lord told Elijah to step outside, for the lesson of his life. Let me read it to you again:

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains, and broke the rocks in pieces 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"  
(I Kings 19:11-13)

This was a pivotal point in Elijah's journey. Beset by his enemies, he has taken refuge in a mountain cave. Then the Lord comes with a message and a lesson. Let's look at the correspondences embedded here.

#### CORRESPONDENCES IN THE ELIJAH STORY

ravens	falsities (AC 866)
mountains	the Lord's heavenly kingdom; a high or spiritual point of view (HH 188; AR 896)
Mt. Horeb	the Divine truth in external things (AC 10,543)
rocks	natural truths from the Divine (AR 915)
cave	obscure good, as we find in temptation (AC 2463)
wind	falsities and the evils they inspire (AE 211)
earthquake	a change of the state of the Church; perversion of the Church through falsity (AR 331, 711)
fire	the burning love of self and the hell of falsities from it (AE 730)
mantle	the Divine truth of the Word; the letter of the Word (AR 328)
voice	anything that accuses; Divine truth (AC 6971)

And now the same story, but from the internal sense, based on these simple correspondences:

let's see how it opens up our spiritual eyes to the deeper story within:

Elijah, instructed to stand outside on the mountain because "the Lord is about to pass by," experiences great elemental forces at work from the safety of his cave. We shall find that these forces are not really external at all, but are instead internal forces of evil, in a fierce confrontation

with Divine good. The safety of the cave represents the good in this great temptation – obscured by Elijah’s great fear, but nonetheless operating for his protection. His greatness among the people now legendary, he is tormented by the destructive furies of his own success. He is confronted by the mighty forces of self-love and the love of worldly power, in a struggle for his soul. In many ways, Elijah is a very modern man. Human Nature is Human Nature; some things never change.

First comes a “great and powerful wind,” strong enough to tear the mountain and shatter the rocks. This illustrates the strength of the falsities and the evils our unbridled will can generate – strong enough to bring us down from a spiritual plane to the level of evil desires, and vanity; strong enough to break the bonds that link the Divine to the truths of the natural world. Sure enough, “the Lord was not in the wind.” This great force of self-intelligence is of ourselves, when there is no spiritual good in it.

Next came an earthquake, and “the Lord was not in the earthquake.” This means a catastrophic force of such magnitude that it can bring about a change in the Church; a perversion in this case, of the Church, through falsity (the wind). It is the vastation of the Church; and remember that in least form, you are a church (AC 4286:4). The Lord allows it, but He is definitely not in it.

The last destructive force to appear is fire. This represents the energies consumed in the pursuit of selfish loves and of the things of this world. This fire rages when we do not acknowledge the good we do as originating in the Lord, and when we do not put the needs of others first. This fire is our own personal hell, and how hot it burns is up to you and me. The Lord is most certainly not in this fire.

Finally, when all these forces have been spent, and Elijah has been spared their destruction, a still small voice is heard; a whisper, that questions Elijah: “What are you doing here?” This is the quiet voice of Divine truth, which by its very nature accuses us – convicts us, to use an old-fashioned term – by bringing light to the darkness of the wind, the earthquake, and the fire. That “still small voice” voice tells Elijah to “go back the way you came,” to quit hiding in a cave – to get back to work.

The Lord indeed passed by the cave in this marvelous story, but He did not pass by until the furious forces of Elijah’s inner, human nature (what we call the proprium) had been identified and defeated. And most importantly: Only after Elijah had “wrapped his face in his mantle” (which means only after he accepted the Lord’s truth as Divine, and was willing to do what it directed) was he prepared to listen to this message from the Lord. Picture the great Elijah, until now too busy doing heroic things in the name of the Lord to listen to Him. Sound familiar? The voice and message were quiet but profoundly clear: “Get to work, Elijah – My work – and be regenerated by the experience.”

We are by nature arrogant and self-important. We often spend our energy in creating great wind, and fire, and earthquakes, which have the power to split mountains and shatter rocks in our spiritual lives. But this energy, as great as it may be, is not our own. It is the energy of our life, which seems so much our own, but which is from the Lord, and so often misdirected for our own selfish purposes. Without the Lord in this energy it is evil, and destructive. Only the Lord, whose Divine truth comes to us very quietly, in an internal way, can guide and direct this great energy for good. He sends us out, into the world to work this good, not inward into caves, not on detours through the hells of fear, depression, or spiritual idleness. He will protect us if we choose to direct

this energy to good, and by this work we are regenerated – united with the Lord in a heavenly life. This new life becomes a journey without end. And remember this: It is the journey itself – not the destination – that provides for our salvation!

Finally the Lord told Elijah, “Go back the way you came...” He wasn’t doing any good in a cave in the wilderness. He wasn’t doing himself any good with all his brilliance, his power, and his miracles. And he certainly wasn’t doing Israel any good. So he returned to his life and his work, and his journey without end. AMEN

## THE LESSONS

1 Kings, portions of Chapters 17, 18, and 19  
*A Narrative of Elijah, Mighty Man of God*

### LESSON 1

- 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”
- 17:2 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying,
- 17:3 “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.
- 17:4 “And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”
- 18:1 Now it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year [of the drought], saying, “Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.”
- 18:2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria.
- 18:17 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?”
- 18:18 And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals.
- 18:19 “Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”
- 18:20 So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.
- 18:21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.” But the people answered him not a word.
- 18:23 “Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it.
- 18:24 “Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”
- 18:25 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us!” But there was no voice; no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they had made.
- 18:29 And it was so, when midday was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.
- 18:30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

- 18:33 And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood."
- 18:36 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word."
- 18:38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.
- 18:39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

## LESSON 2

- 19:1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.
- 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."
- 19:3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.
- 19:4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"
- 19:5 Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."
- 19:8 So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.
- 19:9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- 19:10 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."
- 19:11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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;
- 19:12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.
- 19:13 So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
- 19:14 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."
- 19:15 Then the Lord said to him: "Go back the way you came..."