

May 9, 2021

## 10. God in the Quiet Sound — 1 Kings 19:9b-18

This encounter between God and Elijah on Mount Horeb fills me with questions. I wonder what prompted Elijah to flee. I wonder what it was about Jezebel's threats that inspired such terror in this man who had just participated in such an impressive show of God's power in overcoming 450 prophets of Baal. What drove him to take the long journey to where we find him—hiding in a cave in the mountain of God? What did he expect would happen there? And what do we make of the interaction between Elijah and God when he finally reaches the cave?

I think Elijah's answer to God's question "What are you doing here?" might hold some clues. Elijah has just witnessed and helped facilitate a mighty manifestation of God's power. And yet, when the word of the Lord comes to him, Elijah's answer reveals that he's a whole lot more concerned with himself than with what God's been up to. Elijah talks of his zeal and his claim that he is the only one of God's prophets left. God's response is to draw near to Elijah, in the exact same place God revealed God's self to Moses. Wind, earthquake, fire—all ways God has revealed God's self in other times and places. But God is not present in any of these. And then, an intangible silence that somehow contains God's presence and the repeated question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah repeats his story. "I have been very zealous for the Lord. . . ." I find this a shocking contrast to the response of Moses in the same situation. Moses, we are told, bowed to the ground and worshiped God, requesting God's presence and blessing in the task before him (Exodus 34:8). Elijah, on the other hand, doesn't acknowledge this or the previous revelation of God with the prophets of Baal. He carries on his tale of self-pity and self-commendation. In response, God does not commend, correct, or comfort Elijah. He is simply told to get back to work,<sup>1</sup> to enlist his replacement, and is reminded that, along with him, seven thousand faithful Israelites have not bowed to Baal.

I can relate to Elijah. In some seasons of my life, I have been very zealous for the Lord when I felt I was one of the few being faithful. Those seasons were tiring, and when I look back on them, I realize that I was so focused on my efforts and agenda that I lost sight of God's power and purposes. It became about me. Could Elijah's fear of Jezebel be because he knew *he* didn't have what it takes to protect himself? Had he forgotten about the God he served, whose "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

Fear and despair are legitimate temptations. Just as the threats of Jezebel were real, we face many threats to our safety and comfort. Elijah's story reminds me that I need to spend more time remembering and retelling God's acts, not my own. In this season, it's not about how I have learned to do online church, how I have pivoted, how I have persevered. Like Elijah, I

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<sup>1</sup>. Brent A. Strawn, "Commentary on 1Kings 19:1-18, *Working Preacher*, November 6, 2011, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/elijah-at-horeb/commentary-on-1-kings-191-18>.

have limits, and my strength is waning. God won the battle with the prophets of Baal, just as God has equipped and carried me and my congregation through this challenging season. When I'm weary, rather than recounting all the reasons I'm spent, I am committed in these coming days to recount the ways God has worked. It's probably a better story, anyway.

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*Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.*

## Resources for this session

- **Kevin Ressler** is the presenter for unit 2, New Creation. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. *The videos are free and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).*
- Patricia Raube, "The Dark Night of the Soul," Union Presbyterian Church, March 7, 2018, <https://upcendicott.org/sermons/2018/3/7/the-dark-night-of-the-soul>
- A **Salt & Light Reproducible** is available for use with this session, found at [www.MennoMedia.org/SL](http://www.MennoMedia.org/SL).