

Research on Elijah and the Still, Small Voice

I Kings 19:1-3, 9-12

“Elijah commanded that all the prophets of Baal be slain, thereby incurring the implacable hatred of Jezebel. He fled for his life far south into the wilderness; but then, greatly discouraged over his failure to halt Israel’s apostasy, he desired to die . . . Physically and spiritually sustained, he journeyed for forty days to Horeb (Sinai), the mount of God’s self-revelation to Moses. There before him on the mount were displayed the mighty forces of earth (as later before John on Patmos), ‘but the Lord was not in the wind . . . the earthquake . . . the fire.’ After these Elijah heard ‘a still small voice’ (Heb. ‘a sound of gentle stillness’) –a divine force more potent than all he had just witnessed. By this experience he also learned, as had Moses, that violence is not the divine method of combating evil” (Shotwell 119).

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.

“Jezebel had just sent a message to Elijah, giving him twenty-four hours to leave Jezreel or be killed. The threat was effective; Elijah ran for his life” (EBC 4.148).

3 And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer–sheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there.

“He [Elijah] went to the right place symbolically. We don’t have to buy a ticket to the geographical spot to do the same. ‘He goes to Horeb, the mount of God,’ the mount that symbolizes the altitude at which one receives the Commandments. What are the Commandments if not God’s will summarized for us: ‘Thou shalt not.’ Coming to Horeb Elijah makes a mistake, a mistake that seems to be built into the human character” (Crisler, *Master* 89).

9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

“After a forty-day trek, Elijah found that he had been drawn by divine providence to Mount Sinai, the sacred place of God’s self-disclosure. . . . Elijah’s forty-day journey is not without significance. Indeed a straight trip from Beer-sheba would require little more than a quarter of that time. Therefore the period is designedly symbolic. As the children of Israel had a notable spiritual failure and so were to wander forty years in the wilderness, so a defeated Elijah was to spend forty days in the desert. As Moses had spent forty days on the mountain without bread and water, sustained only by God while he awaited a new phase of service, so Elijah was to spend forty days thrown on the divine enablement as he prepared for a re-commissioning by God.” (EBC 4.149).

“*He finds a cave and lodges there.* That’s presumably part of the evolution of man on earth, the cave man. This is atavism (a reversion to a more primitive type ancestor) to Adam. Nothing could be more remote than Adam. In the middle of a crisis, do we become atavistic? Do we regress to that primitive type? Do we begin to look like jungle beings, animal kingdom residents, rather than of the heavenly kingdom and the Holy City?”

“It apparently is not God’s will to see His man as a cave man. Moving Elijah urgently out of the cave, notice the divine question, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ That’s not progress on earth, going back to the cave. That’s a full retreat” (Crisler, *Master* 89).

10 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

“At length the word of the Lord aroused Elijah. The penetrating interrogation called for minute self-evaluation. Did Elijah yet understand his failure and God’s gracious guidance in bringing him to this place? Elijah’s reply indicated that he did not. Like Phineas of old, he alone had been very zealous for the Lord in the midst of gross idolatry. His soul was somewhat bitter at having served God so earnestly and spectacularly and yet having experienced rejection and solitary exile” (*EBC* 4.150).

“I have been very jealous for the Lord—The picture which he draws here of apostate Israel is very affecting:

1. They have forsaken thy covenant—They have now cleaved to and worshipped other gods,
2. Thrown down thine altars – Endeavored, as much as they possibly could to abolish thy worship, and destroy its remembrance from the land.
3. And slain thy prophets – That there might be none to reprove their iniquity, or teach the truth; so that the restoration of the true worship might be impossible.
4. I only, am left – They have succeeded in destroying all the rest of the prophets, and they are determined not to rest till they slay me” (Clarke online).

11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks 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:

“*The Lord passed by.* All the experiences here described formed part of a single manifestation of the divine presence, but the earlier stages did not reveal God in the same degree as the last. Elsewhere in the OT, wind, fire, and earthquake are frequent accompaniments of a Theophany (see Ex. 19:18, Ps. 18:7-18, Ps. 97:3-5, Job 38:1, Ezek. 1:4)” (Dummelow 225).

12 And after the earthquake a fire; *but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*

“The Lord did not comment on Elijah’s self-justification but offered instruction. He was to come out of the cave and stand before the Lord, for he would soon pass by. Suddenly a rock-shattering tempest smote the mountain around Elijah. Surely this would announce the divine presence. But the Lord was not in the wind. There followed a fearful earthquake, but God was not there. . . . There followed a faint whisper, a voice quiet hushed and low. Elijah knew it instantly. It was God! What a lesson for Elijah! Pulling his prophet’s cloak over his face, Elijah made his way reverently out of the cave” (*EBC* 4.150).

“God’s will may be seen not in any of this commotion. ‘Be silent, O earth O flesh,’ the prophet Zechariah said. ‘Be still and know that I am God’ David tells us. It is the ‘still small voice’ then that conveys God’s will. We don’t need to go into a cave. None of them obviously could have affected Elijah. Rocks were blowing all over the place. The earthquake, fire, very close to where Elijah was standing. . . . Nothing obviously could touch Elijah when he was doing God’s will. God would never have misled Elijah to tell him to stand right there on that mount if there were any potential danger there” (Crisler, *Master* 90).

“The effects of Christian Science are not so much seen as felt. It is the ‘still, small voice’ of Truth uttering itself. We are either turning away from this utterance, or we are listening to it and going up higher” (*S&H* 323:28-32).

“The infinite Truth of the Christ-cure has come to this age through a ‘still, small voice,’ through silent utterances and divine anointing which quicken and increase the beneficial effects of Christianity” (*S&H* 367:24-27).

“The ‘still, small voice’ of scientific thought reaches over continent and ocean to the globe’s remotest bound” (*S&H* 559:8-10).

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Abbreviation key:

EBC = *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

S&H = *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*