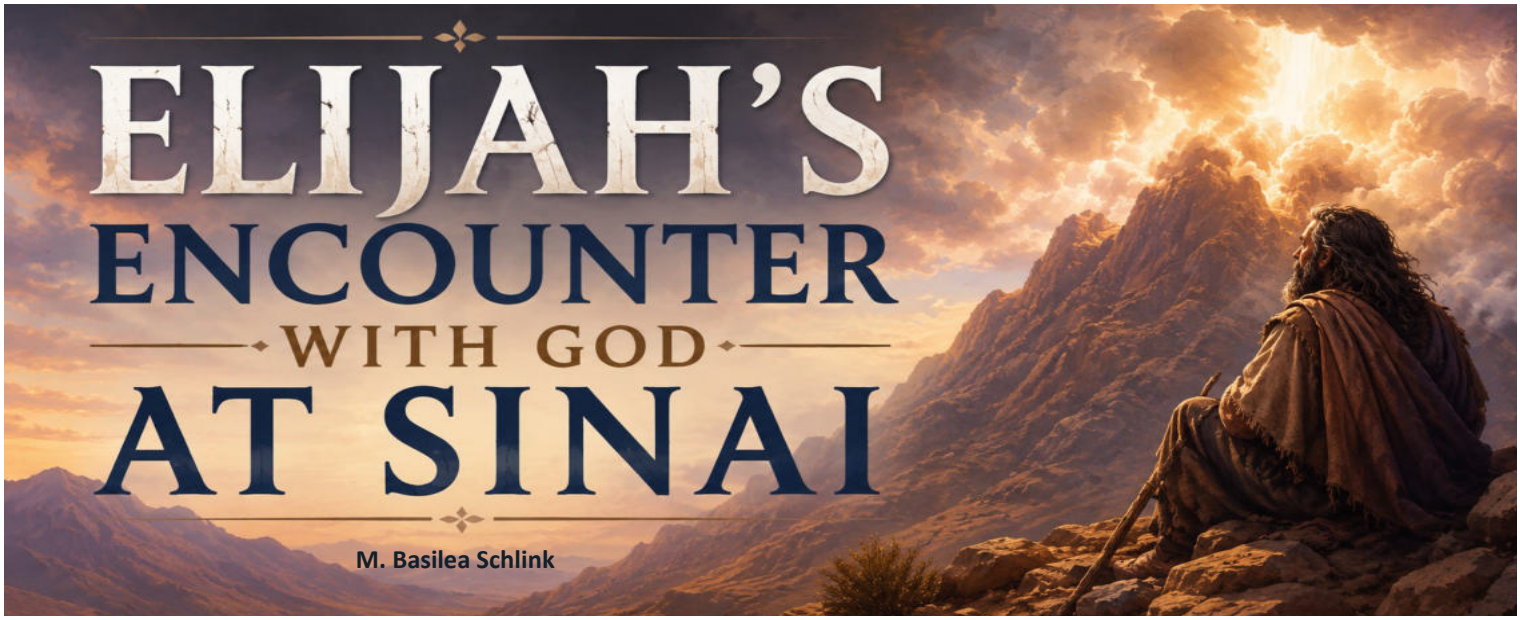


Reading: Exodus 24; 1 Kings 19

The happening at Elijah's Hollow tells us that God chooses places to manifest His glory – places like Mount Sinai. At the foot of the mountain Moses had an encounter with God in the burning bush when God commissioned him for his awesome task. On the mountaintop Moses received an awe-inspiring revelation of God in the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Covenant. And three-quarters of the way up the mountain lies a small plateau, the scene of yet another revelation.

Traditionally, the plateau is the site where the 70 elders of Israel climbed to worship God. There they had a glimpse of His glory, though at a distance. The site would have been located below the summit, for Moses, who was with the 70 elders, was later summoned by God with the words, "Come up to me on the mountain" (Exodus 24:12 NIV). Moses, we are told, approached God alone in the cloud (v.18).

On the plateau the 70 elders, along with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were privileged to behold God. Although they didn't actually see God Himself or His face, they caught a glimpse of His shining presence and character in the glory reflected in the pavement beneath His feet. Encounters with God leave a lasting mark: our lives will never be the same again. Either we allow His light to convict, cleanse and humble our souls, opening the way for Him to shape and transform us. This is what it means to be taken into the presence of God. Or else our sinful nature resists the purifying effect of His light. Then the light will cast us into the depths of darkness, where we are at the mercy of the enemy of our souls. Presumably this is what the 70 elders experienced, in contrast to Moses, who was transformed by the glory of God. For what did the elders do after coming down from the mountain? They lapsed into the sin of idolatry. Within weeks they were worshipping the golden calf, and ultimately the evil one.

Sinai can tell of yet another revelation of God. Some 500 years later, Elijah, strengthened by the food provided by an angel during his 40-day trek through the wilderness, arrives heavy-hearted at Sinai. In utter despair he lies down in a cave, where he spends the night.

Then the word of the Lord comes to him as a sign of God's care. God sees Elijah's desperation and turmoil. He reaches out in mercy and compassion; He has not forgotten him. He speaks to him, ministering help and comfort, and getting him back on track.

God knows what is troubling Elijah. Still, He lets Elijah spill out the despair and temptation gnawing at his soul, the cries sounding like accusations: *I spent myself for God and for His glory. But to what effect? The people have rejected God's covenant, smashed the altars, and killed His prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left. And now they're after me! I can't go back to my country. And even if I did, there is nothing more I can do.*

There Elijah sits brooding in his cave of despondency. *It's all over. It was all for nothing.* Unconsciously he is declaring, *God is dead. He's not doing anything to help.* But God is alive, as Elijah is to experience. In Elijah's darkest hour God helps the discouraged prophet by giving him a sign of His presence. *I am there. I am the living God and do great things. I create something new when all appears to be lost.*

First a powerful wind arises, tearing the mountain apart and shattering the rocks, as a declaration: *God's power is unlimited. In a single moment He can eliminate every adversary.* Then comes the earthquake, yet another sign of God's power. Shaken by the event, Elijah is to recognize that where his words had failed there is someone else who can fill the people of Israel with a wholesome dread – the God of Israel. After the earthquake comes fire as proof that the holy God is a consuming fire.

Does the experience of the holy and all-powerful God make Elijah tremble in his soul? Does he realise that with his complaining he is accusing God? Does he find healing for his wounded heart and bitter despair? Evidently, not yet. He has already seen fire come down from heaven in answer to his prayers. At this point, only one thing can heal Elijah's wounded heart: the loving presence of God. With the sound of a gentle whisper God draws near. *My dear blind servant, I want to open your eyes. There are still 7000 souls in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah, your efforts were not in vain.* What a gracious and comforting message – straight from the Father-heart of God! Ever caring, He does not rest until He has led His servant out of the cave of despondency.

Sinai – mountain of God. Where does God reveal His innermost heart? Not in fire, wind or quake, but in a gentle whisper. Sinai – mountain of God. How does God reveal Himself? In the giving of His commandments, inspired by love. In graciously choosing to dwell among us. In a gentle whisper, a scarcely audible sigh. This is the God who made known His name to Moses here: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6). And in Jesus Christ we may call Him "Father".

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary

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