

# Hearing God in the Sound of Silence

## 1 Kings 19:1-18

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### I. Background to 1 Kings 19

- A. The dissolution of the people of God into two often competing nations – both politically and religiously - is recounted in 1 Kings 11 & 12, when one of Solomon’s officials was selected by God and symbolically given ten tribes by Ahijah the prophet.
- B. Surrounded by great wealth and widely respected by the kings of the surrounding nations, Solomon had married 700 hundred of their royal daughters, plus keeping some 300 concubines. These “turned his heart” – as the text says (1 Kings 11:4, 9) – after their gods, “away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice” (11:9).
- C. Interestingly, as a side-note, Ahijah recounted God’s words that ten tribes would be given to Jeroboam – and IF he would obey God, walk in God’s ways, and do what is right – God would build for him a dynasty as “enduring” as David’s dynasty. One tribe would be given to Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, to rule in Jerusalem, “the city where” God had said, “I chose to put my name” (11:36).
- D. The 12th tribe (not mentioned), that of Benjamin, joined with Rehoboam and the tribe of Judah, thinking to fight and destroy Jeroboam and the ten tribes. And so the people of God were divided, Israel in the north at Samaria, worshiping two golden calves (twice the sin of Aaron when Moses was on the mountain of God); Judah in the south, its capital in Jerusalem, and worship in the Temple designed by David and built by Solomon. In Israel, the kings were mostly evil, worship continued to the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Probably the worst of these kings was Ahab, married to Jezebel, a priestess of Baal. Ahab built a temple for Baal, setting up an altar and an Asherah pole. The annals of the kings of Israel say that Ahab “did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.
- E. This sets the stage for **Elijah the Tishbite’s** powerful and prophetic ministry. And it gives us the context to understand the story of Elijah’s apparent fear (of Jezebel) and *discouragement* (in ministry), which (I hope) will help all of us to find *encouragement* in our mission.
- F. Elijah & John the Baptist
  1. **Matthew 3:1-4** – “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he [Matthew writes] who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, *Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.*’ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.” [see, in this description, Elijah’s garments: 1 Kings 18:46; 19:13; 2 Kings 1:3, 8; 2:8, 13-14. Lit. “*possessor of hair*”; either “a hairy man” or a “a garment of hair”. See Zechariah 13:4 – “On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet’s garment of hair...”]. See also **Matthew 11:2-16** – Jesus’ words about John.
  2. **Mark 1:2-3** – “It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of *you*, who will prepare *your way*’ [speaking, as identified in v. 1, to “Jesus Christ. the Son of God.”] – ‘a voice of one calling in the desert’, ‘prepare the way fo the Lord, make straight paths for him’.”
  3. **Luke 1:17** (the angel [Gabriel] of the Lord to priest, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist): “...he will go on before the Lord, in the Spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” See also **Luke 7:18-28** – Jesus’ words about John.
  4. **John 1:19-27** – “They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not’. ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No’. John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, Make straight the way for the Lord’.”
  5. **Isaiah 40:3-5** – “A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken’.”

6. **Malachi 3:1ff.** – “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap...he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.” **Malachi 4:5** – “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”
7. **Exodus 23:20ff.** – [God speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai, about the covenant he is making with Israel] – “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way [the way to where?] and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him.”

### Commentary

**N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019, pp. 144ff.**

“All four Gospels frame the story of Jesus in terms of the long-awaited return of Israel’s God. Matthew and Mark introduce John the Baptist by reference to Isaiah 40, where the herald announces YHWH’s return. Mark adds Malachi 3.1, with the extra echo of Exodus 23.20. The idea of John as the ‘Elijah’ figure, preparing for Israel’s God himself, is emphasized in Matthew 11, where Jesus himself quotes the relevant texts. Luke does the same thing in chapter 7 and elsewhere: for him, Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem is the actualization of God’s return....John has his own way of saying the same thing, but it *is* the same thing. The Gospels...*are* apocalyptic. That is to say, they are describing this-worldly events and doing so in such a way as to claim that in these events the ‘revelation’, the unveiling, the visible coming of God, took place.

**Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016, pp. 22-23.**

“...despite patristic emphasis on Malachi as the background to the opening of Mark’s Gospel, the wording of Mark 1:2 is closer to Exodus 23:20 [Septuagint] than to Malachi 3:1 [Septuagint]....

“The linkage of Mark 1:2 to the Exodus passage is also hermeneutically significant, for it evokes the other side, the positive side, of the dialectic of judgment and restoration. It is taken from a passage in which God, speaking with Moses on Mt. Sinai, promises to send an angel/messenger...to lead Israel into the promised land of Canaan....

“By echoing this [Exodus] passage Mark artfully hints that the Baptist is not only a voice of judgment (as the Malachi allusion would suggest) but also the forerunner of a new entry into the land of promise. ‘I will send my angel before your face’ is a word of promise, signifying protection, victory, and the end of wilderness wandering.

“...Mark quickly frames the events of his story with allusions to God’s promise to lead Israel into the land (Exod 23), God’s intention to send a messenger warning Israel of impending judgment (Mal 3) and God’s comforting word that promises redemption and a new exodus (Isa 40).”

## II. Presentation

SLIDES	NOTES
	



## 2.1 Story...on the run

### Jezebel's threat

**LXX ...** As surely as you are Elijah - 'My God is Yah' - and I am Jezebel - 'Where is the Baal?'  
**MT ...** "May the gods deal with me, be it every so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

The back-story to Elijah – i.e., King Ahab and Jezebel, begins with Ahab [son of Omri, more wicked than his predecessors, worships his wife's gods, conflicts with prophet Elijah] but in 18:19 we begin to see the reality: the real power behind the idolatry and the throne [religion and politics] is Jezebel, In 19:1 we read this interesting bit: "Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, and thus begins our story.

## 2.2 Story...on the run

- Elijah runs for his life
- Falls asleep under a tree
- Elijah begs to die
- Provisioned by God
- "to the mountain of God – into the cave"
- Spends the night...



Three scenes/three players: Jezebel - Elijah - YAHWEH  
**"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."**

- leaves his assistant at Beersheba, *abandoning* his ministry
- tired and depressed: begs to die and falls asleep
- served *dinner* and *breakfast* by an angel (cake over hot coals)
- arrives at Mt. Horeb: twice the Lord speaks; twice Elijah replies
- the LORD [YAHWEH - God's covenant name] used 9 times by narrator in the dialogue, plus twice by Elijah

## 2.3 structured narrative

the LORD questions Elijah - "What are you doing here?"  
Elijah replies  
LORD: "go out"  
wind - earthquake - fire - gentle whisper  
Elijah went out  
a voice questions Elijah - "What are you doing here?"  
Elijah replies

God does not always manifest himself in spectacular displays of power (Mt. Horeb), miraculous *or* natural; but he will enter a "dialogue" and *not* abandon his servant.

Elijah covers his face with his cloak: Does he remember that Moses could not look on God's face? that God covered Moses with his hand (Ex. 33:20-23)?

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

There are two ways to read the next segment:

1. Elijah remained in the depths of the cave during the wind - earthquake - fire and finally the "gentle whisper", then came and stood at the mouth of the cave, where heard the voice.
2. Others (and some very early Jewish commentators) look closely at the grammar, at the participles used – which are in the future tense. On this reading, vv. 11b-12 occur with Elijah at the mouth of the cave. Then he hears [God's] voice: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

## Elijah's reply

I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty  
The Israelites have rejected your covenant  
broken down your altars  
put your prophets to death with the sword  
I am the only one left  
they are trying to kill me too

The LORD said to him,  
"Go back the way you came..."



## “Go back...”

1. anoint Hazael king over Aram
2. anoint Jehu king over Israel
3. anoint Elisha to take your place

“I reserve 7,000 in Israel

– those –

- who have not bowed down to Baal
- whose mouths have not kissed him

## God’s recommissioning of Elijah. (see also 2 Kings 1)

“Go back...” Now, all the way to Damascus, beyond Israel.

1. International: anoint Hazael king over Aram (in Damascus).  
*2 Kings 8:7-15*
2. National: anoint Jehu king over Israel.  
*2 Kings 9:6* (carried out by Elisha)
3. Covenant people: anoint Elisha to succeed you as prophet.  
*2 Kings 2:1-18*

### 3.1 time for encouragement

- Honest self-awareness
  - same question from the LORD – 19:9 & 13
  - same answer from Elijah – 19:10 & 14
  - it is the LORD God Almighty with whom we are speaking
- Importance of integrity before God – not half-truths
  - self-righteousness - “I have been very zealous”
  - self-pity - “I am the only one left, now they – not she – want to kill me too”
  - self-importance - “I am the only one left”

### 3.2 time for encouragement

- Review our history with God
  - God fed him before - Kerith Ravine; widow's home (twice)
  - God feeds him now - twice by an angel (19:5b, 7)
- Reflect on our ministry before God
  - Jezebel's threat was intended to end Elijah's work – he left his servant at Beersheba and ran on alone (19:3-4)
  - God still had work for Elijah to do – three-fold anointing (19:15-16); pronounce God's judgment on Ahab (21:17-19) & Jezebel (21:23) as well as Ahab's household (21:24)
- God's work continues. So must we in God's service.
- Encouragement comes not in the dramatic or in the quiet, but from doing the work that God has called us to do.

### 3.3 time for encouragement

- God's faithfulness needs to be met by our obedience.
  - recounts the past: Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God - Elijah went into the cave: “in effect, Elijah became a second Moses”
  - in the present: NIV - “a gentle whisper”; KJV - “a still, small voice”, like that of Jesus (Matthew 11:28-29)
  - in the future: God is in control: politically among the nations (Syria as well as Israel); spiritually among his people (“anoint Elisha” - God is both a covenant-maker and a covenant-keeper; there are still 7,000 in Israel)
- The power of God is best demonstrated in our weakness

## Q & A

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