

ELIAS IN THE DESERT

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King Achab told his wife Jezabel all that Elias had done on Mount Carmel. But Jezabel, who had led away the king and the people to the worship of false gods, hated the prophet. Now she sent him a message: "May my gods curse me if I do not kill you tomorrow as I killed all the others." This frightened Elias, so he fled southwards into the kingdom of Juda, where another king, a descendant of David, was reigning. At Bersabee, just inside the frontier, he left his servant behind, and went on ahead himself a whole day's journey into the desert.

But his strength was at an end. He lay down exhausted under a juniper tree and longed for death. "I can bear no more, Lord," he prayed. "Take my soul to yourself!" Then he went to sleep from sheer weariness.

But all at once an angel of the Lord appeared to him, and touched him saying: "Wake up and eat!" He sat up at once and found close by his head a flat loaf and a jug of water. He ate and drank and fell asleep again. And the angel came a second time, touched him, and said: "Wake up and eat, for you still have a long journey to go!" Elias stood up, and ate more of the bread and drank some more water. Then, strengthened by that food, he walked on for forty days until he reached God's mountain, Horeb, which is also called Sinai.

He found himself a cave and went into it, hoping to stay there. But then he heard the voice of God, saying: "What are you doing here, Elias?" And he started complaining to God: "The sons of Israel have forgotten the Covenant. They have pulled down your altars and killed your priests. I alone have escaped the sword. I have always spoken zealously for you, O Lord, and now they are trying to hunt me down and kill me also."

Then the Lord said to Elias: "Go out of the cave and stand on the rocks before the face of God. And I, the Lord, will pass by." A great and powerful wind swept along before the Lord, pulling down the mountains and rending the rocks. But the Lord was not in the stormy wind. After the storm came an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came the whisper of a gentle breeze. Then Elias hid his face in his mantle and adored God. For he knew that God was near him now.

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Yet another example of God's power, gentle though strong, working through man's weakness. With these examples before her, Israel should have learned to mistrust herself. So should we: our strength is from God: "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). This strength is from the gentle but powerful Spirit. Indeed God deals gently with man always: "Learn of me for I am meek", says our Lord. And He feeds us, more truly than Elias was fed, with the Bread of Angels.