

Moses, Elijah, & the Rock

David Flatt

Some of the most amazing scenes in the Bible occurred at Mt. Sinai. God chose this site to interact with people. In time, Mt. Sinai became known as the mountain of the Lord. The cataclysmic signs He performed on His mountain pointed to what He would do in the future with another Rock.

Moses and the Mountain

Moses experienced the power of God on Mt. Sinai. God had rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. After saving the people, God brought them to Mt. Sinai to give them the law. While Moses was on the mountain, the people grew doubtful of his return. They crafted an idol. When God saw the faithlessness of the people, He wanted to destroy them. Moses interceded for Israel and begged God to spare the people. God relented.

After this tense encounter, Moses requested to see the glory of God. Moses would be obliterated by the glory of God's face. Instead, God said, "...Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (Exod. 33:21-23). Moses was protected from the piercing glory of God in the cleft of the rock. The rock absorbed the intensity of God's glory.

Elijah and the Mountain

Many years later, this mountain became the sight of another awesome encounter with God. In the days of the prophet Elijah, Israel became increasingly wicked. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. Elijah and the prophets of Baal would make altars to their gods. Whichever god ignited its altar would prove they were the true and living God.

The prophets of Baal prayed and cut themselves to get Baal to ignite their altar. Nothing. Elijah built an altar and had it saturated in water. When Elijah prayed, something miraculous began to occur. Fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the altar, and the watery moat around the altar. Jehovah was the true and living God.

Elijah proceeded to execute 450 prophets of Baal. Victorious, Elijah hurried to the capital city of Jezreel. He expected Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen, to either repent or be overthrown. Shockingly, Ahab and Jezebel did not repent, and they were not overthrown. In fact, a bounty was put on the life of Elijah. In a state of confusion and defeat, Elijah fled to Beersheba.

Exhausted and hungry, Elijah asked the Lord to take his life. In response, an angel of the Lord was sent to him. While Elijah was sleeping, the angel cooked a warm meal for him to eat. He ate and slept more. Sometimes when we are at our worst, what we need most is a warm meal and a good night's sleep. When Elijah woke, the angel of the Lord told him to eat and prepare to make a journey. Elijah traveled forty days and nights to Mt. Sinai (also known as Mt. Horeb).

When Elijah arrived at the mountain of God, he rested in a cave or a cleft. There, the Lord visited him. The Lord asked Elijah why he had come to the mountain. Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10).

Elijah had a plan to restore Israel. A grand demonstration of God's power! A miracle would do the trick! Surprisingly, the miracle did not restore Israel. They did not repent. Elijah thought he was the only faithful Israelite. Then, God told Elijah to go and stand on the mountain.

Before Elijah could leave the cave or cleft, a strong wind blew and beat the rock to pieces! But the Lord was not in the wind. Next, an earthquake shook the mountain! But the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then, the same fire from Mt. Carmel shot down and blazed the mountain. But the Lord was not in the fire. Somehow, Elijah was still alive. Then, in the silence, Elijah heard a still small voice.

For a second time, the Lord asked Elijah why he had come to the mountain. Elijah explained himself again. Then, the Lord told Elijah, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place" (1 Kings 19:15-16). God had a plan to accomplish His purposes in the world. While Elijah had not recognized it, God was bigger and far more capable than he ever imagined.

The Rock

Many years later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John on a mountain hike. Six days earlier, Jesus had revealed for the first time that He would die in Jerusalem and be raised on the third day. The disciples were confused. They were unwilling to allow Jesus to be taken from them. Yet, what they were about to witness would serve as confirmation of God's plan for Jesus.

The Bible describes Jesus being transfigured. His physical appearance transformed. His face radiated light like a ray of the sun. The brightness of His eternal glory pierced the veil of the physical realm. Then, two of the ancients appeared: Moses and Elijah. They spoke to Jesus about His death (Luke 9:31). God allowed Moses and Elijah to lay eyes on the Rock that saved them.

What's the Point?

Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John, struggled to understand what God was doing in the world. Why would God want Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Syria? What could God possibly do with an unbeliever? Or, moving forward in time, why did Jesus have to go to Jerusalem and die? What good is a dead Messiah? We often think in small-minded ways. We cannot see beyond our pride. God accomplished the unthinkable through Jesus.

Jesus, the Rock, took the wind, earthquake, and fire of God. He took God's wrath for our sins. He bore the punishment for our sins. By His stripes, we are healed. God works in mysterious ways! What good could come from a dead Messiah? The destruction of sin and the offering of eternal life. God is greater and grander than any of us could ever imagine.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36)

Conclusion

But how do we receive the salvation of the Rock? We do not have to perform some feat of strength. We do not have to go up to Heaven because He has come down from Heaven. We do not have to descend to the depths of death because Jesus has been raised from the dead. We simply need to believe in Jesus. We need to confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts. We need to be baptized to share in what God did at the death and resurrection of Jesus. We need to proclaim a new king to a world of unbelievers.

Instead of expecting some grand gesture to show us the way, we need to listen to the still small voice. In other words, we need to read the word of God. The Bible tells us about God, His Son, and our need for salvation. As God commanded on the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son! Hear Him!"