Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My Sunday class will be the second week of a new series, *Biblical Women You Want to Know, but Probably Don’t*. It will be on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

Today we come to a story of burnout, which is totally appropriate for this point in our Time of Virus. Even when we feel used up, comebacks are possible with God’s help, as it was for Elijah.

***Kings 19:1-19 (NRSV)***

[Elijah, as the prophet of God, has just won a stunning victory over the priests of Baal. In the confrontation of God and Baal, the Canaanite god was a complete no-show. But Elijah’s victory and his killing of the priests of Baal only deepened Queen Jezebel’s hatred of him.]

**Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.**

**But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.**

**Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”**

**He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”**

*The story of Elijah’s big win*

The book of Kings (1 and 2 Kings are a single literary work) is a tragic story of a faithful God pursuing a faithless people. In 869BC, Ahab ascended to the throne of Israel, the northern Israelite kingdom. Though most of the kings before and after Ahab “did evil” in God’s sight, Ahab “did evil in the sight of YHWH (the Lord) more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). Ahab married Jezebel, a foreigner, and turned to the worship of Baal, the supreme god of the Canaanites. It is here that we meet the prophet Elijah, who intervened in the religious crisis brought on by Ahab and Jezebel. The story of Elijah’s confrontation with Jezebel and with the priests of Baal is one of the great biblical narratives.

When Elijah arrives on the scene in 1 Kings 17, he heads immediately for King Ahab. The first challenge that Elijah lays down before Ahab sets the stage for all that follows. In the arid regions of Palestine, rain was scarce and life-giving. Baal was worshiped as the bringer of rain. Thus, when Elijah promises the Baal-worshiping Ahab a drought, he is saying that Baal is a fraud, that Baal cannot bring rain. Baal cannot give life. Instead, life is YHWH’s alone to give and to take away.

The stories that follow are all stories of the Lord God’s life-giving power. God tells Elijah to flee from Ahab and hide in a ravine, for God has ordered ravens to feed him there. Then, God sends Elijah to see a widow, whom God also instructs to feed Elijah. However, when Elijah arrives, the widow can’t feed herself and her son, much less Elijah. But then, in a surprising display of God’s life-giving power, the widow’s jar of flour and bottle of oil are filled and would not run out. Then, just in case we’ve missed the point, the widow’s son becomes ill and dies. Elijah prays over the boy and God restores him to life. It is all about life, life, and more life.

When God tells Elijah to return to Ahab, Elijah directly challenges the priests of Baal to a contest. It would be YHWH vs. Baal. But the contest is not really a contest at all. In one of the most dramatically told stories in Scripture (told in 1 Kings 18), Baal is a complete no-show, being no more than a figment of the Canaanite spiritual imagination.

On that day, in a spectacular display of God’s power and presence, Elijah showed all those who had ears to hear and eyes to see that the Lord God was not merely the best god on the block, the Lord was the only God, the creator and ruler of all that was, is, or will be.

And after God’s victory? Rain, in huge rushing torrents. Yes, it is YHWH and only YHWH who gives life.

*After the thrill of victory came the agony of defeat*

What a win.Elijah alone against 450 priests of Baal. The Lord God v. Baal. The crowds gathered, expecting quite a show. And they got it. Yet, in the end, Elijah still faced a determined and evil enemy. He had managed to cow King Ahab, but not his wife, Jezebel. She was more determined than ever to track Elijah down, find him, and kill him.

So Elijah ran and he ran far. Right into the Sinai wilderness, where Moses had run after killing the Egyptian overseer. Elijah had been in the wilderness a single day when he found a shady bush (politely called a “tree” in translation), under which to sit . . . and to die. Elijah told God that he’d had enough. Despite the Mt. Carmel triumph, he asked to die.

But God would not let go. Instead, God sent Elijah an angel, who twice set out food and water for Elijah as he slept. Both times, Elijah woke up and ate, strengthened and encouraged to begin a long journey.

For forty days and forty nights, Elijah made his way to the same mountain where Moses had met God at the burning bush and later received the Law. It was called Mt. Horeb (or Mt. Sinai), the mountain of God. There, like Moses, Elijah would meet with God.

When God asks Elijah what he is doing at the mountain, it is clear that Elijah’s depression has not passed entirely. He has been zealous for God, but Elijah is certainly not the only prophet left. He is not as alone as he feels. Nonetheless, God tells Elijah “to stand before the Lord,” for God is going to pass by him, just as God did for Moses.

Soon came typical biblical theophanies, i.e., manifestations of God’s presence, or so it seems. A powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire. These are all the traditional language of God’s arrival (e.g., see Exodus 19:16 or all of Psalm 29). But this time, God is not in them. After the fireworks pass, all that is left is the “sound of sheer silence.” Yet, in this stillness, the hushed sound, Elijah encounters God.

However, unlike Moses, who emerged from his God-time with a face that shone of God’s glory (Exodus 34:29), Elijah seems unchanged! God asks Elijah the same question he asked before passing by and Elijah gives exactly the same answer. So far as Elijah is concerned, this humbling encounter with God hasn’t changed things at all.

So, speaking to him for a third time, God tells Elijah, “Go, return to your way.” There might have been no evident change in Elijah, he might still be a burned-out prophet, but God has fed him, rescued him, and now God sends him north to work. He is to anoint not only an Israelite king, but a Gentile king as well. And, most significantly, Elijah is sent to meet his God-chosen successor, Elisha.

*Burned out but back*

Despite the angel’s intervention, Elijah is burned out when he gets to God’s mountain and is still burned out after God’s visit. Yet, God doesn’t let him go, doesn’t give him a pass. I’m sure that if you told Elijah of his future, he wouldn’t have believed it. Elijah would escape death, instead riding directly to heaven in a chariot of fire, drawn by fiery horses, and carried upward by a whirlwind.

Perhaps it is this way for us as well. When we are used up and have had enough, God can see what we cannot, a future still filled with surprising possibilities. Elijah had a comeback alright, but it was God who not only dragged him through it but refused to let go. God wouldn’t let Elijah give up. It is as if God shoved him forward into his future. God still had work for Elijah. And God always has work for us as well, for, like Paul, we are ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), bearing witness to the Good News in all that we say and do.

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott