

# Fight or Flight

## 1 Kings 19:1-13

### Pierre Cannings, Ph.D.

#### I. “Empty” Threat – vs. 1-2

- a. Jezebel –
  - i. The biblical texts present a thoroughly negative picture of this undoubtedly powerful woman.
  - ii. Jezebel became the influential queen of the North kingdom as the foreign wife of Ahab.
    - 1. This woman has the fierceness Ahab lacks, the civil authority the prophets of Baal lacked, and a freshness for battle that Elijah no longer possesses
  - iii. She fostered the worship of Canaanite fertility deities, supporting 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah at her royal table (1 Kgs 18:19).
  - iv. In the meantime, she ruthlessly persecuted the rival prophets of Yahweh, causing them to go into hiding (1 Kgs 18:4).
    - 1. Jezebel has killed Yahweh’s prophets before (cf. 1 Kgs 18:4, 13), so Elijah has no reason to doubt her threats indicate her true intentions.
  - v. So far, Elijah has encountered serious yet less-than-overpowering opposition. At this point in the story, though, he meets the one person as committed to Baal as he is to Yahweh. What Jezebel hears from Ahab causes her to threaten Elijah’s life. She swears by the “gods” that Elijah will die.
- b. Life as Life of Prophet by tomorrow
  - i. Victory seems to be transformed into defeat, the brave prophet into a cowering refugee, and the victory over death and Baal into an opportunity for death to reassert itself through Jezebel’s oath to take Elijah’s life
  - ii. She threatened to take his **life** in 24 hours in retaliation for his slaughtering the 450 Baal prophets.

#### II. Give Up – vs. 2-5

- a. Afraid –
  - i. *He was afraid.* Read *wayyirā*, with most versions and some mss mt, *wayyar*, “he saw,” is meaningless. Pointed difference between the present depiction of Elijah and the bravery he displayed on Mount Carmel; *fear for his own personal safety accompanies the prophet throughout the present episode*
  - ii. fatigue, lack of faith, or a sense of resignation at the prospect of never having peace—Elijah flees. He fears death the way Obadiah did (18:9–14).
  - iii. Ironically by contrast he had told the widow in Zarephath not to be afraid (17:13).
  - iv. He had just demonstrated that **the gods** to whom she now appealed in her curse had no power at all. (Her statement that she was willing to be dealt with **severely** by the gods [cf. 2:23; 20:10; 2 Kings 6:31] points up the seriousness of her threat.
  - v. She was so certain she would kill Elijah that she willingly put her own welfare “on the line.”)
- b. Ran for his life
  - i. he set right out” (see Note on 17:10) have as their object “for the sake of his life).
  - ii. Indeed, the fact that he dismisses his servant in Beersheba, the southernmost point in Judah, then goes a day’s journey farther may indicate he has given up his ministry altogether
    - 1. *Still fearful he might be discovered by Jezebel’s spies he told his servant to stay behind and he traveled alone one more day’s journey (about 15 miles) into the Negev desert.*
    - 2. *Finally he sat down under a broom tree (a desert bush that grows to a height of 12 feet and provides some, though not much, shade) and rested.*
  - iii. and he fled to *Beer-sheba of Judah* on the southern border of the Sown, merely a stage in his flight, for he was going into No Man’s Land.
- c. Wanted to Die - Num 11:15; Jer 20:14–18; Jon 4:3, 8
- d. Slept it off
  - i. Elijah had forgotten the lessons God had been teaching him at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel.
  - ii. His eyes were on his circumstances rather than on the **Lord**.
  - iii. His statement that he was **no better than** his **ancestors** (19:4) suggests that he was no more successful than his forefathers in ousting Baal-worship from Israel. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah **lay down ... and fell asleep**.
  - iv. Rather than resting in God for His protection as he had for the past three and one-half years, Elijah **ran for his life**. He ran all the way through the kingdom of Judah to the southernmost town in the land, **Beersheba**.

### III. Get Up – vs. 6-8

- a. Angel of the Lord
- b. Arise and Eat
  - i. Now God begins to renew his faith by miraculously feeding him. In other words, the Lord ministers to him as in the past. Twice an angel feeds him, thereby giving him strength to travel to “Horeb, the mountain of God
- c. Second time
  - i. The Journey is too great for you - the distance was far (enough) 1S 26:13, דרך too long a journey 1K 19:7
  - ii. Went in Strength forty days
    - 1. Moses and the Israelites had traveled in that wilderness for 40 years, sustained by the manna God had provided for them and learned lessons of His faithful care and provision. Now Elijah would traverse the same desert for **40 days and ... nights**, sustained by the bread God provided and would learn the same lessons.
    - 2. A direct trip from Beersheba to Mount **Horeb** (the ancient name for Mount Sinai; cf. Ex. 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; Deut. 5:2; 1 Kings 8:9; Ps. 106:19; Mal. 4:4) would have taken Elijah only about 14 days on foot (a distance of ca. 200 miles). God was reminding him and teaching him during those 40 days and nights
  - iii. Horeb Mountain of God
    - 1. **Horeb**; mountain of legislation
    - 2. Even in later poetry Yahweh is still said to come to Israel’s aid “from Sinai” (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:18
    - 3. Finally He went to **the mountain of God**, the very place where God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and where He had entered into a covenant with His Chosen People.
    - 4. He knows God revealed himself at Horeb, the mountain of Moses’ calling and the giving of the covenant (Cf. Exod 3–4; 20–24). Here at another mountain Elijah will decide for himself if the Lord is God.
    - 5. It is there that Yahweh’s name is first revealed, according to Exod 3:14–15, and the previous sacredness of the mountain is implied by Exod 3:5 and 19:12–13. In view of this it is a priori likely that the traditions in Exodus 19ff. go back ultimately to a visit or visits to the mountain by an element or elements of early Israel, most probably including Moses, and that this was the origin of the

identity of this group and of later Israel as the *'am yhw*, “the people of Yahweh” (Judg 5:11, 13).

6. Apart from what seems to be an isolated narrative of a journey there by the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19). The emphasis fell instead on sanctuaries within the land of Canaan (Exod 15:17), one of which even became known as “the mountain of Yahweh” (Isa 2:3; 30:29). But Sinai/Horeb retained its place in tradition and became the gathering point for an increasingly elaborate body of religious law and narrative which sought to define the essence of Yahwism

## IV. Go Out vs. 9-13

### a. Cave Lodged

- i. It does not refer to a particular cave at Horeb, which some identify with “the crevice of a rock” where Moses had stood (cf. Exod 33:22), though the echo of that earlier stay on the mountain can be heard

### b. The Lord Appeared

- i. What are you doing here?
  1. God has fed him as before, and God has spoken to him as in the past. Why has he fled?
  2. God had not sent him here as He had directed him to other places (cf. 1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1). Elijah had run out because of fear (19:3). Elijah’s response revealed that he felt he was standing completely alone and defenseless against the ungodly forces that threatened to overpower him
  3. Elijah witnessed what Moses had seen in those mountains centuries before (Ex. 19:16–18) and what he himself had seen on Mount Carmel only a few days earlier (1 Kings 18:38, 45), namely, a spectacular demonstration of the power of God, this time in **wind**, an **earthquake**, and **fire**. But on this occasion **the Lord was not in** any of these, that is, they were not His instruments of self-revelation.

### c. Elijah responds

#### i. Zealous

1. to rebel against, to campaign for, inveigh against The phrase ‘the zeal of the Lord (of hosts)’ occurs several times (2 Ki. 19:31; Is. 9:7; 37:32; cf. Is. 26:11; 63:15) and means his jealous concern for his own people and their welfare
2. Apparently he had hoped that the Mount Carmel episode would produce a final victory over Baalism.

#### ii. They forsook your covenant

1. Torn down altars

- a. *your altars they have destroyed*. The altar to YHWH on Mount Carmel was noted as having been destroyed; cf. 18:30.
  - 2. Killed prophets
    - a. *your prophets they have killed by the sword*. Jezebel's persecution is referred to in 18:4.
    - b. God's word, which never fails. The first "word of the Lord" asks him why he is at Horeb. He replies that Israel is apostate, they kill the prophets, and he alone stands for covenant faith
- iii. I alone am Left
  - 1. They seek my life
  - 2. Take away
    - a. *And I, I alone am left*. Elijah made this point at Carmel (cf. 18:22), where he also ignored the one hundred prophets saved by Obadiah
    - b. Of course he knew that he was not **the only one left** of all the faithful remnant (cf. 18:13), but he felt all alone. Interestingly Elijah spoke only of the Lord's **prophets** being killed (cf. 18:13a); he made no mention of Baal's 450 prophets who were killed. Fear and discouragement caused him to see only the dark side. He sensed failure in spite of his being **zealous**
- d. Again
  - i. A second word of the Lord invites the prophet to "stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord," for God will pass by there. This theophany, or appearance of the Lord, reminds readers of Exod 33:18–22,
  - ii. The Lord does not speak, however, through these natural phenomena. Certainly Elijah has experienced God's sovereignty over nature, and has benefited from miraculous fire, but what he needs now is a definitive word from the Lord.
  - iii. Evidently some time later when Elijah was back in his cave (19:13) he **heard** the sound of a **gentle whisper**
    - 1. "Go back the way you came," a command that calls Elijah back into active service of the Lord

# Word Studies

Jezebel - The biblical texts present a thoroughly negative picture of this undoubtedly powerful woman. Jezebel became the influential queen of the <sup>1</sup>N kingdom as the foreign wife of Ahab. She fostered the worship of Canaanite fertility deities, supporting 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah at her royal table (1 Kgs 18:19). In the meantime, she ruthlessly persecuted the rival prophets of Yahweh, causing them to go into hiding (1 Kgs 18:4). The great Elijah himself did not underestimate her death threats (19:1–3). Moreover, she contrived the legal death of Naboth the Jezreelite so that her husband could obtain his vineyard (1 Kings 21). Because of her so-called “harlotries and sorceries” (2 Kgs 9:22), she met her ignominious death at the hands of Jehu. But her death was not without dramatic flourish. Hearing the news of Jehu’s massacre of the royal family, Jezebel “painted her eyes and adorned her hair.” Looking down at her adversary from her window, she ridiculed Jehu as an upstart claimant to the throne like his predecessor, Zimri. Her harem eunuchs, sensing changes in power in Jehu’s favor, flung her down from the window at Jehu’s command. Jehu, whose appetite seemingly was not affected by the gruesome death (“he went in and ate and drank”), begrudgingly ordered a burial for the “cursed woman,” since “she is a king’s daughter.” However, fulfilling Elijah’s prophecy that “the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel” (2 Kgs 9:30–37; cf. 1 Kgs 21:23), all that remained of Jezebel’s body was her skull, feet, and hands.<sup>2</sup>

Afraid – *He was afraid*. Read *wayyirā*<sup>3</sup>, with most versions and some ms<sup>3</sup>s. m<sup>4</sup>t, *wayyar*<sup>3</sup>, “he saw,” is meaningless and, if taken as “he understood” (cf<sup>5</sup>, e.g.<sup>6</sup>, Exod 3:4; 8:11), the object of the verb is lacking (cf<sup>7</sup>. Qimḥi: “He saw that he was in danger”). The mistaken vocalization in m<sup>8</sup>t cannot be explained as avoidance of the discrepancy between the present depiction of Elijah and the bravery he displayed on Mount Carmel (Jones); fear for his own personal safety accompanies the prophet throughout the present episode<sup>9</sup>

Ran for His life - *he set out to save his life*. A pregnant construction. The two verbs *wayyāqom wayyēlek* “he set right out” (see Note on 17:10) have as their object “for the sake of his life”;

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<sup>1</sup>N north (ern)

<sup>2</sup> Gale A. Yee, “[Jezebel \(Person\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 848.

<sup>3</sup>MSS manuscripts

<sup>4</sup>MT Masoretic Text

<sup>5</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>6</sup>e.g. Egyptian

<sup>7</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>8</sup>MT Masoretic Text

<sup>9</sup> Mordechai Cogan, [I Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 10, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 450.

cf<sup>10</sup>. <sup>11\*</sup>*nws* 'l npš (2 Kgs 7:7); more frequently “*mlt* 'l npš (e.g.<sup>12</sup>, Gen 19:17; 1 Sam 19:11). There was enough time for Elijah to make his escape, inasmuch as Jezebel did not move immediately to apprehend her enemy; in sending a messenger, the queen so much as suggested to Elijah that he had better be off. O<sup>13</sup>r was this really a “confession of impotence” on her part, as Skinner suggested? After the setback at Carmel, she may have felt that she no longer had a free hand in pursuing her course, as she did when she cut down prophets with impunity<sup>14</sup>

Horeb- Several arguments confirm that “there was from ancient times a special relationship between Yahweh and Mount V 6, p 49 Sinai which was already in existence before the Exodus from Egypt” (Nicholson 1973:63). Even in later poetry Yahweh is still said to come to Israel’s aid “from Sinai” (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:18—Eng v 17). Sometimes other areas to the <sup>15</sup>S of Palestine are mentioned (Judg 5:4; Hab 3:3), but the link with Sinai is particularly close. The phrase *zeh sînay* in Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9—Eng v 8 (RS<sup>16</sup>V “yon Sinai”) most probably means “the lord of Sinai” (NE<sup>17</sup>B, NJPS, NI<sup>18</sup>V; for this interpretation of *zeh*, see HALA<sup>19</sup>T, 253). It is there that Yahweh’s name is first revealed, according to Exod 3:14–15, and the previous sacredness of the mountain is implied by Exod 3:5 and 19:12–13. In view of this it is a priori likely that the traditions in Exodus 19ff. go back ultimately to a visit or visits to the mountain by an element or elements of early Israel, most probably including Moses, and that this was the origin of the identity of this group and of later Israel as the ‘*am yhwh*, “the people of Yahweh” (Judg 5:11, 13). It is difficult to separate this event, historically and traditio-historically, from the Exodus (Nicholson 1973:53–84). Whether the term “covenant” was used already at this early stage to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and what, if any, obligations the worship of Yahweh was thought at first to imply, it is impossible to know with certainty. But the exclusiveness of later Yahwism must have been a feature of it from early times (Judg 5:8; Ps 81:9–11—Eng vv 8–10) and the ban on images and the observance of the sabbath may also be very ancient (see further EH<sup>20</sup>I, 464–72). There is no positive evidence that Sinai was a place of pilgrimage in OT times (against Noth 1940) and from the beginning of the monarchic period at least the old desert-sanctuary of Yahweh ceased to be of any importance, apart from what seems to be an

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<sup>10</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>11\*</sup> asterisks on Hebrew words denote the consonants of verbal roots

<sup>12</sup>e.g. Egyptian

<sup>13</sup>Or *Orientalia*

<sup>14</sup> Mordechai Cogan, [\*I Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 10, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 450–451.

<sup>15</sup>S south (ern)

<sup>16</sup>RSV Revised Standard Version

<sup>17</sup>NEB New English Bible, Oxford, 1961–70

<sup>18</sup>NIV New International Version

<sup>19</sup>HALAT *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, ed. W.

Baumgartner et al.

<sup>20</sup>EHI R. de Vaux. 1978. *The Early History of Israel*. Trans. D. Smith. Philadelphia

isolated narrative of a journey there by the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19). The emphasis fell instead on sanctuaries within the land of Canaan (Exod 15:17), one of which even became known as “the mountain of Yahweh” (Isa 2:3; 30:29). But Sinai/Horeb retained its place in tradition and became the gathering point for an increasingly elaborate body of religious law and narrative which sought to define the essence of Yahwism.<sup>21</sup> *to the mountain of God, Horeb*. The mountain of YHWH was known in Pentateuchal traditions both as Horeb (e.g.<sup>22</sup>, Exod 3:1; 33:6 [the “<sup>23</sup>E” strand]; Deut 1:6; 4:10; cf.<sup>24</sup>. 1 Kgs 8:9) and as Sinai (Exod 19:11, 20 [the “<sup>25</sup>J” strand]; Lev 25:1). It seems that the location of the mountain was lost to tradition, since it was not the site of pilgrimage (as sometimes claimed; e.g.<sup>26</sup>, Gray citing Noth); therefore, much controversy surrounds the location of Mount Horeb/Sinai. The commonly-held identification with Jebel Musa in the southern Sinai Peninsula, not known earlier than the Byzantine Age, is challenged by other mountain sites farther north and in the Negev, all dependent on the reconstructed route of the Israelite wanderings; see *EncJud*<sup>27</sup> d 14:597–600; and Davies 1979, 63–69.

9. *There he went into a cave*. The m<sup>28</sup>t has “the cave”; on the use of the definite in Hebrew, cf.<sup>29</sup>. 18:4. It does not refer to a particular cave at Horeb, which some identify with “the crevice of a rock” where Moses had stood (cf.<sup>30</sup>. Exod 33:22), though the echo of that earlier stay on the mountain can be heard<sup>31</sup>

Zealous- to rebel against, to campaign for, inveigh against<sup>32</sup> The phrase ‘the zeal of the Lord (of hosts)’ occurs several times (2 Ki. 19:31; Is. 9:7; 37:32; cf. Is. 26:11; 63:15) and means his jealous concern for his own people and their welfare<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> G. I. Davies, “[Sinai, Mount \(Place\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 48–49.

<sup>22</sup>e.g. Egyptian

<sup>23</sup>E the Elohist source

<sup>24</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>25</sup>J the Yahwist source

<sup>26</sup>e.g. Egyptian

<sup>27</sup>*EncJud Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 16 vols. Jerusalem: Keter, 1972

<sup>28</sup>MT Masoretic Text

<sup>29</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>30</sup>cf. “compare with” or “see”

<sup>31</sup> Mordechai Cogan, [1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 10, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 452.

<sup>32</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1110.

<sup>33</sup> N. Hillyer, “[Zeal](#),” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1262.



*your altars they have destroyed.* The altar to YHWH on Mount Carmel was noted as having been destroyed; cf<sup>34</sup>. 18:30.

*your prophets they have killed by the sword.* Jezebel's persecution is referred to in 18:4.

*And I, I alone am left.* Elijah made this point at Carmel (cf<sup>35</sup>. 18:22), where he also ignored the one hundred prophets saved by Obadiah<sup>36</sup>

**19:1–2** So far, Elijah has encountered serious yet less-than-overpowering opposition. At this point in the story, though, he meets the one person as committed to Baal as he is to Yahweh. What Jezebel hears from Ahab causes her to threaten Elijah's life. She swears by the "gods" that Elijah will die. Jezebel has killed Yahweh's prophets before (cf. 1 Kgs 18:4, 13), so Elijah has no reason to doubt her threats indicate her true intentions.<sup>2377</sup> This woman has the fierceness Ahab lacks, the civil authority the prophets of Baal lacked, and a freshness for battle that Elijah no longer possesses. She is as worthy an opponent as God's servants ever face in Scripture. Who, or what, can defeat her?

**19:3–8** For whatever reason—fatigue, lack of faith, or a sense of resignation at the prospect of never having peace—Elijah flees. He fears death the way Obadiah did (18:9–14).<sup>2388</sup> DeVries thinks "Elijah interprets Jezebel's personal attack on him as the end of his ministry."<sup>2399</sup> Indeed, the fact that he dismisses his servant in Beersheba, the southernmost point in Judah, then goes a day's journey farther may indicate he has given up his ministry altogether.<sup>3400</sup> Elijah's flight in 19:1–3 changes the face of the story. A. Hauser explains:

In three short verses the writer has totally changed the flow of the story. Victory seems to be transformed into defeat, the brave prophet into a cowering refugee, and the victory over death and Baal into an opportunity for death to reassert itself through Jezebel's oath to take Elijah's life.<sup>3411</sup>

How will the Lord prove to be God now? This question remains *the* fundamental issue in the story.

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<sup>34</sup>cf. "compare with" or "see"

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<sup>36</sup> Mordechai Cogan, [\*1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 10, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 453.

<sup>3727</sup> Matheney, "1 Kings," 213.

<sup>3828</sup> Hauser, *From Carmel to Horeb*, 61. On Elijah's flight see also R. B. Allen, "Elijah the Broken Prophet," *JETS* 22 (1979) 195–201. He argues that Elijah was broken, not frightened by Jezebel.

<sup>3929</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 235.

<sup>4030</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4131</sup> Hauser, *From Carmel to Horeb*, 63.

After “a day’s journey into the desert,” an exhausted Elijah says he wants to die, which, ironically, is the opposite desire to what he expressed by fleeing into the desert in the first place. Now God begins to renew his faith by miraculously feeding him. In other words, the Lord ministers to him as in the past. Twice an angel feeds him, thereby giving him strength to travel to “Horeb, the mountain of God.” Elijah knows God exists in Israel, Phoenicia, and the desert. He knows God revealed himself at Horeb, the mountain of Moses’ calling and the giving of the covenant (cf. Exod 3–4; 20–24). Here at another mountain Elijah will decide for himself if the Lord is God.

**(8) God Reassures Elijah (1 Ki 19:9–18)**

**19:9–10** Besides feeding the prophet, the Lord reassures Elijah with the book’s most certain comfort—God’s word, which never fails. The first “word of the Lord” asks him why he is at Horeb. He replies that Israel is apostate, they kill the prophets, and he alone stands for covenant faith. Again, he sees no real reason to continue. Apparently he had hoped that the Mount Carmel episode would produce a final victory over Baalism.

**19:11–13a** A second word of the Lord invites the prophet to “stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord,” for God will pass by there. This theophany, or appearance of the Lord, reminds readers of Exod 33:18–22, where Moses desires to see God’s glory and is rewarded by being allowed to view “the back” of the Lord’s splendor. God places Moses in the rock and covers him with a divine “hand” to protect him. Here, Elijah waits for God’s word through tearing wind, ground shaking earthquake, and roaring flame. The Lord does not speak, however, through these natural phenomena. Certainly Elijah has experienced God’s sovereignty over nature, and has benefited from miraculous fire, but what he needs now is a definitive word from the Lord.

He receives this word in “a gentle whisper.”<sup>422</sup> Perhaps the Lord attempts to teach Elijah not to expect always the miraculous and wondrous deliverance from problems.<sup>433</sup> Maybe God wants “to signify to the prophet that He did not work in His earthly kingdom with the destroying zeal of wrath, or with the pitiless severity of judgment.”<sup>444</sup> Or the Lord may simply try to explain to Elijah that he works in small ways at this time. God speaks in a quiet voice here to a prophet drained of strength. The next passage will reveal still further the Lord’s willingness to labor with relatively limited human resources. Regardless of the meaning of the natural wonders, however, it is God’s word alone that will heal the prophet in this moment of crisis.

**19:13b–18** The voice asks Elijah why he has come to the mountain. R. Gregory says that this repetition of the question asked in 19:9 forces Elijah to consider carefully his current position and his future destiny. “The first time this statement of defense is presented to the audience, the emphasis falls on Elijah’s feelings (informative) but the precise reiteration exhibits Elijah’s inflexibility and egocentrism (elucidating).”<sup>455</sup> God has fed him as before, and God has spoken to him as in the past. Why has he fled?

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<sup>4232</sup> For a discussion of this fairly odd Heb. phrase, consult J. Lust, “A Gentle Breeze or a Roaring Thunderous Sound?” *VT* 25/1 (1975) 110–15.

<sup>4333</sup> Cf. Gray, *1 and 2 Kings*, 365; and Dilday, *1, 2 Kings*, 220.

<sup>4434</sup> Keil, “I and II Kings,” 258.

<sup>4535</sup> Gregory, *From Carmel to Horeb*, 134.

Elijah answers as in 19:10: Israel has rejected the covenant, Israel has become idolatrous, he is the only prophet left, and Jezebel plans to kill him. Implied in this response is Elijah's doubts that the Lord can save him or turn the nation back to the covenant. Who has God become in the prophet's life? Only a restatement and reassessment of his theology can extricate him from this pit of fear and depression.

The Lord's word to him reaffirms God's uniqueness, his sovereignty over all nations, and the importance of the prophetic word. God tells him, "Go back the way you came," a command that calls Elijah back into active service of the Lord.<sup>3466</sup> He must anoint Hazael king of Syria, which declares Yahweh's lordship over that non-Israelite country. Similarly, he must anoint Jehu king of Israel, thus reestablishing the Lord's rule over the Northern Kingdom. Finally, Elijah must anoint Elisha to take his place. This command, coupled with the Lord's comment that he has selected, or caused to remain,<sup>3477</sup> seven thousand persons who do not worship Baal, reminds Elijah that God's word cannot be silenced. It remains the force that produces the remnant, protects the remnant, and empowers the remnant. As a part of this remnant, Elijah can expect God's protection and empowerment.<sup>48</sup>

19:1–18. Elijah's flight and despair; the divine revelation on Horeb, and fresh commissions. Elijah has celebrated his God's triumph, but now Jezebel takes her revenge. **1, 2.** The statement that *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done*, etc., is an intimate touch. The queen, woman-like, acts imperiously, sending a message to Elijah that she has put herself under oath to make his *life like the life of one* of those prophets, and so she has sworn by *Gods*. For the intensity of such an oath see Comm<sup>49</sup>. 18:8–15. **3.** And Elijah *was afraid*<sup>50</sup> [so with MS<sup>51</sup>S, Grr<sup>52</sup>., <sup>53</sup>V; <sup>54</sup>H saw<sup>55</sup>], and he fled to *Beer-sheba of Judah* on the southern border of the Sown, merely a stage in his flight, for he was going into No Man's Land. Having left his servant behind (**4**) *he went a day's journey in the steppe. And he came and sat down under a juniper tree*: so EV<sup>56</sup>V

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<sup>4636</sup> R. B. Coote, "Yahweh Recalls Elijah," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. B. Halpern and J. D. Levenson (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981) 119.

<sup>4737</sup> The Heb. word is וְהִשָּׁאֵרְתִּי, a *hiphil* stem meaning "I caused to remain."

<sup>48</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 221–224.

<sup>49</sup> Comm. main text of this Commentary.

<sup>50</sup> [ ] in the translation has bearing on the text of H

<sup>51</sup> MSS manuscript(s).

<sup>52</sup> Grr. Greek texts.

<sup>53</sup> V Vulgate.

<sup>54</sup> H the Hebrew text.

<sup>55</sup> [ ] in the translation has bearing on the text of H

<sup>56</sup> EVV English Versions, AV, RVV.

after <sup>57</sup>V; the plant is a broom-tree (so J<sup>58</sup>V), *genista roetam*. Cf. Robinson's comment in his diary at Beer-sheba: "Elijah sat down under a shrub of Retem, just as our Arabs sat down under it every day and night" (*B*<sup>59</sup>*R* 1, 302). And he prayed for death, the common lot of all. **5.** There *he lay down and slept* <sup>Γ</sup> *under a juniper-tree* <sup>Γ</sup> [see Note]. *And lo, one* (om. *an angel*, with Grr<sup>60</sup>.) *touching him*, and he heard the bidding, *Arise and eat*. **6.** *He looked*, and saw a miraculously prepared breakfast; cf. the miraculous feedings in ch. 17. **7.** He fell asleep again, to be wakened by the now recognizable *Angel of Yhwh* (the antique phrase for the apparition of Deity, peculiar to J in the Pentateuch), summoning him to eat again, *because the journey is too much for thee*. **8.** *And so in the strength of that food he went for forty days and forty nights to the Mount of God, Horeb*. Šanda calculates this distance *via* Akaba as about 480 km., and so the daily travel at 12 km.; rather, with Kittel, the item is proof how little the Northern narrator knew of that territory. Horeb is predominantly the name for the mount of revelation in the Pentateuchal sources E (Northern) and D (cf. 8:9), but Sinai in J and P; in the Northern Song of Deborah the revelation occurred in Seir-Edom (Jud. 5:4; 'That is Sinai,' v. 5 is a gloss); and in the Blessing of Moses (Dt. 33) Sinai-Seir-Paran is the location. Accordingly the northern traditions vary. This objective of Elijah is the same as that in the history of Moses (Ex. 3:1), with here also a corresponding theophany. **9a.** The lodging in *a cave* is another correspondent, *i.e.*, with 'the hole in the rock,' out of which Moses saw 'the back' of Yhwh (Ex. 33:21ff.); but there is no verbal identity between the two descriptions. **9b–11a,** *And the word of Yhwh came to him, and said to him: What doest thou here, Elijah?* There follows Elijah's despairing response, as again in v. 14, and then the divine command: *And he said: Go forth, and stand in the mount before Yhwh*. V. 11a contradicts v. 13, and all that precedes, from v. 9b and on, is duplicate, to vv. 13, 14. Hence modern critics in general (*e.g.*, Wellhausen, *Comp*<sup>61</sup>, 230, Stade, Benzinger, Šanda, Skinner) rightly agree that the whole passage is secondary. The command, "to stand in the mount before Yhwh" may have been modelled after the Mosaic tradition (Ex. 19:20, etc.), and the mysterious scene presented below is summed up here in the more commonplace statement that *the word of Yhwh came to him*. **11b–13.** *And lo! Yhwh was passing by. And a great wind and strong, rending mountains and breaking rocks before [in the presence of, or, in advance of?] Yhwh: Yhwh was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake: Yhwh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire: Yhwh was not in the fire.* Contrast the fiery phenomena which otherwise attended Elijah's career (18:38, II. 1:10ff., 2:11). *And after the fire a sound* [Heb<sup>62</sup>. *voice*] *of a light whisper*. So with Burney's excellent rendering, although the translation of A<sup>63</sup>V, *a still small voice*, remains classical. Contrast of this saying of enduring religious import with the materials of other theophanies (*e.g.*, Ex. 19:18ff.) is naturally pressed by commentators; but it is

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<sup>57</sup>V Vulgate.

<sup>58</sup>JV Jewish Version.

<sup>59</sup>BR GALLING, K.: Die israelitische Staatsverfassung in ihrer vorderasiatischen Umwelt, AO 28, Heft 3/4, 1929.

<sup>60</sup>Grr. Greek texts.

<sup>61</sup>Comp. WELLHAUSEN, J.: Die Composition des Hexateuchs u. der historischen Bücher des A.T., ed. 3, 1899; pp. 263–301 on Kings=Bleek, Einl.<sup>4</sup>, 231–67

<sup>62</sup>Heb. Hebrew.

<sup>63</sup>AV King James Bible ('Authorized Version'), 1611, current text [AV].

to be borne in mind that in such physical manifestations there is generally the subtle distinction between 'the Face,' 'Glory,' 'Name,' 'Word,' of the Deity, and his *persona propria*. The marvel is that here in a legend about an early Northern man of God the spiritual nature of God and of his self-revelation to man is for the first time expressed in historical narrative. V. 13 is of equally delicate character: *When Elijah heard, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and he went out and stood in the opening of the cave*. A striking historical parallel to this scene is the call of Mohammad, who received his first visions in a cave in the mountain of Hira, and who enveloped himself in his cloak upon the revelation; see Surah, 73, 1; 74, 1, and W. Muir, *Life of Mohammad*, vol. 1 (rev. ed.<sup>64</sup>, 1923), 49 f. Cf. K. Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter* (1935), 36 f., e.g., "das Einwickeln gehörte also offenbar auch zu den Gebräuchen der altarabischen Mantik." The zephyr-like whisper fascinated the prophet, who was terrified by the earlier stupendous phenomena. The inquiry by articulate voice: *What doest thou here, Elijah?*, is personal, rebuking his faintheartedness; life is worth living, for there is more for him to do elsewhere than in the Mount of God. The primitive divine is rebuked even as was the great Jeremiah: "If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" (Jer. 12:5). A great mission first discovers the man's soul. **14**. Elijah obstinately makes his complaint: *I have been most zealous for Yhwh, God of Hosts; for the Bnê-Israel have forsaken thee* <sup>65</sup>[with Grr<sup>66</sup>; <sup>67</sup>H thy covenant; see Note, v. 10<sup>68</sup>], *thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away*. With this plaint Yhwh is not concerned; he has other errands for him.<sup>69</sup>

19:1–5a. **Jezebel** had not been present on Mount Carmel; her husband reported to her what had taken place. Infuriated by Elijah's treatment of her **prophets** ... **Jezebel sent a** message to him. He was evidently still in the city of Jezreel as she was (cf. 18:46) when he received her warning. She threatened to take his **life** in 24 hours in retaliation for his slaughtering the 450 Baal prophets.

It is remarkable that her threat terrified **Elijah** as it did. Ironically by contrast he had told the widow in Zarephath not to be afraid (17:13). He had just demonstrated that **the gods** to whom she now appealed in her curse had no power at all. (Her statement that she was willing to be dealt with **severely** by the gods [cf. 2:23; 20:10; 2 Kings 6:31] points up the seriousness of her threat. She was so certain she would kill Elijah that she willingly put her own welfare "on the line.") Evidently Elijah's fear sprang from the power Jezebel possessed. Rather than resting in

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<sup>64</sup>ed. edition(s).

<sup>65</sup>[ ] in the translation has bearing on the text of H

<sup>66</sup>Grr. Greek texts.

<sup>67</sup>H the Hebrew text.

<sup>68</sup>[ ] in the translation has bearing on the text of H

<sup>69</sup>James Alan Montgomery, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings\*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1951), 312–314.

God for His protection as he had for the past three and one-half years, Elijah **ran for his life**. He ran all the way through the kingdom of Judah to the southernmost town in the land, **Beersheba**. Still fearful he might be discovered by Jezebel's spies he told **his servant** to stay behind and he traveled alone one more **day's journey** (about 15 miles) **into the Negev desert**. Finally **he sat down** under a **broom tree** (a desert bush that grows to a height of 12 feet and provides some, though not much, shade) and rested. He was so discouraged he **prayed that he might die**. Elijah had forgotten the lessons God had been teaching him at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel. His eyes were on his circumstances rather than on the **Lord**. His statement that he was **no better than his ancestors** (19:4) suggests that he was no more successful than his forefathers in ousting Baal-worship from Israel. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah **lay down ... and fell asleep**. 19:5b–8. Elijah woke at the touch of a divinely sent messenger. This **angel** had prepared freshly baked **bread**, still warm, and plenty of **water**, which he invited Elijah to consume. The prophet did so and then returned to his rest. **The angel** probably appeared as a human being as was common in the Old Testament.

Again the angel woke Elijah, perhaps after he had slept for some time, and urged him to **eat** more food since **the journey** before him would require **much** energy. Moses and the Israelites had traveled in that wilderness for 40 years, sustained by the manna God had provided for them and learned lessons of His faithful care and provision. Now Elijah would traverse the same desert for **40 days and ... nights**, sustained by the bread God provided and would learn the same lessons. A direct trip from Beersheba to Mount **Horeb** (the ancient name for Mount Sinai; cf. Ex. 3:1; 17:6; 33:6; Deut. 5:2; 1 Kings 8:9; Ps. 106:19; Mal. 4:4) would have taken Elijah only about 14 days on foot (a distance of ca<sup>70</sup>. 200 miles). God was reminding him and teaching him during those 40 days and nights. Finally He went to **the mountain of God**, the very place where God had revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites and where He had entered into a covenant with His Chosen People.

*b. Elijah's revelation (19:9–18)*

19:9–10. Arriving at one of the mountains in the Sinai range Elijah found a **cave** and took refuge in it. There he received a revelation from God. **The Lord** began this lesson with the question, **What are you doing here, Elijah?** (cf. v. 13; Gen. 3:9) God had not sent him here as He had directed him to other places (cf. 1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1). Elijah had run out because of fear (19:3). Elijah's response revealed that he felt he was standing completely alone and defenseless against the ungodly forces that threatened to overpower him (cf. v. 14). Of course he knew that he was not **the only one left** of all the faithful remnant (cf. 18:13), but he felt all alone. Interestingly Elijah spoke only of the Lord's **prophets** being killed (cf. 18:13a); he made no mention of Baal's 450 prophets who were killed. Fear and discouragement caused him to see only the dark side. He sensed failure in spite of his being **zealous**. Mercifully God did not lecture Elijah or chasten His chafed prophet. God simply gave him a demonstration of His ways.

19:11–14. Standing on the mountainside outside his cave (cf. v. 9) Elijah witnessed what Moses had seen in those mountains centuries before (Ex. 19:16–18) and what he himself had seen on Mount Carmel only a few days earlier (1 Kings 18:38, 45), namely, a spectacular demonstration of the power of God, this time in **wind**, an **earthquake**, and **fire**. But on this occasion **the Lord was not in** any of these, that is, they were not His instruments of self-revelation.

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<sup>70</sup>ca. *circa*, about

Evidently some time later when Elijah was back in his cave (19:13) he **heard** the sound of a **gentle whisper**. Recognizing this as a revelation of God **he pulled his cloak over** part of **his face**, walked **out to the mouth of the cave**, and **stood** there waiting for God to act. God asked the same question He asked earlier (cf. v. 9): **What are you doing here, Elijah?** The prophet's response was identical to his first reply (cf. v. 10), suggesting that even though he may have understood the point of God's display of natural forces for his benefit he still felt the same way about himself.

The message God seems to have intended for Elijah is that whereas He had revealed Himself in spectacular demonstrations of His power in the past at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel, He would now use Elijah in gentler, less dramatic ways. These ways God proceeded to explain to His servant (vv. 15–18). God would deal with Elijah's personal feelings about himself later in a gentle way too.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas L. Constable, "[1 Kings.](#)" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 527–529.