

FIRST KINGS

Chapter 19

Elijah Flees to Horeb

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” ³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵ Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. all at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

19:1-8 Unnerved by Jezebel’s threat, the hitherto dauntless champion of the Lord’s cause “ran for his life.” Fleeing the Northern Kingdom, he did not stop until he came to Beersheba, the southernmost city of Judah. From there, the dispirited prophet continued his journey south to Mount Horeb (Sinai) “in the strength” of food supplied by “the angel of the Lord.” Samuel had a similar lapse into fear (1 Sam 16:2). Luther: “The Holy Spirit does not always impel godly people; He lets them do some things in accordance with their own will and wish. When Elijah killed the prophets of Baal, he was impelled by the Spirit of God (1 Kg 18:40); yet later on when Jezebel’s wrath has been reported to him, he fears for himself...He is not commanded by God to withdraw. His reason kept telling him that he would safe if he hid in the desert...These facts were recorded to comfort us, who have no other thought about saints than that they were blocks and logs without feeling. Before this he was not afraid of the king; now he runs away from a woman. Accordingly, all this seems to be foolish; but it shows great understanding and is very helpful, because it is recorded for the comfort of the churches, in order that we may know how merciful God is. We may indeed be evil and weak, provided that we are not found among those who persecute, hate, and blaspheme God. God wants to have patience with our weakness. (TLSB)

19:1 AHAB TOLD JEZEBEL – He was bound to give her a report of all that had transpired, and his heart undoubtedly had to sanction the execution which had taken place. (Kreztmann)

19:2 *May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely.* A curse formula (see note on 1Sa 3:17). (CSB)

one of them. The dead prophets of Baal (v. 1). (CSB)

She did not dare to have him put to death outright, and would probably not have carried out her threat, on account of the attitude of the people, but she hoped to get rid of the prophet by this scheme. (Kretzmann)

God's mighty miracles did not change the heart of Jezebel. This wicked woman, who had already killed many of the Lord's prophets, now swore to avenge the death of the 450 prophets of Baal. She swore by her gods that Elijah would die within twenty-four hours. (PBC)

Eight hundred years later Jesus warned His apostles that the unbelieving would continue to hate God's messengers. The time would come, Jesus said, "when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." All this will happen, Jesus added, "because they have not known the Father or Me" (John 16:2-3). (PBC)

If God's people today confess that the Lord is the only God and that Jesus is the only Savior, they can expect the same kind of treatment from the unbelieving world. (PBC)

19:3 *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.* In spite of Elijah's great triumph in the trial on Mount Carmel and the dramatic demonstration that Elijah's God is the Lord of heaven and earth and the source of Israel's blessings, Jezebel is undaunted. Hers is no empty threat, and Ahab has shown that he is either unwilling or unable to restrain her. So Elijah knows that one of the main sources of Israel's present apostasy is still spewing out its poison and that his own life is in danger. (CSB)

When he noted the conditions in the northern kingdom and the unchanging hatred of Jezebel, which seemed to make all further attempts useless, he arose and went for his life, commending his soul to his God and Lord, that he might be secure in His protection. (Kretzmann)

Beersheba. The southernmost city in Judah (see notes on Ge 21:31; Am 5:5; see also Jdg 20:1). (CSB)

LEFT HIS SERVANT THERE – He did this because he intended to be entirely alone in the wilderness with his God. (Kretzmann)

Once Elijah felt safe in Judah, he would call a new servant (vv 19_221). (TLSB)

19:4 *broom tree.* A desert shrub, sometimes large enough to offer some shade. (CSB)

This was a furze-bush or broom-plant, abundant in beds of streams. (Kretzmann)

This was Desert bush that grows to 10-12 feet. Hebrew text has “one broom tress,” empathizing scarcity of vegetation in that desolate area. (TLSB)

prayed that he might die. Cf. Jnh 4:3, 8. Elijah concluded that his work was fruitless and consequently that life was not worth living. He had lost his confidence in the triumph of the kingdom of God and was withdrawing from the arena of conflict. (CSB)

He felt that he had lived long enough, that he had done his duty; he was tired of his prophetic office and longed for rest. (Kretzmann)

Ashamed that he ran when he should have confronted Jezebel by faith, Elijah wanted to die, sharing the fate of his fathers (cf. Nu 14:28-30). (TLSB)

19:7 *angel of the LORD.* See note on Ge 16:7. God in his mercy provided sustenance and rest for his discouraged servant. (CSB)

Ministering angel acts in a comforting, gentle manner. Typically, the appearance of an angel evokes fear. (TLSB)

When the OT talks about “the angel of the Lord,” it is not describing one of Gods’ created angels. It is referring to that Messenger of God who is equal with the Father and who deserves our worship, namely, the Lord Jesus. That Lord who told His disciples, “Surely I am with you always” (Matt 28:20), was with Elijah in the wilderness. We will meet that angel again 2 Kings 1:3 and 19:35. (PBC)

the journey is too much for you. Evidently Elijah had already determined to go to Mount Horeb, where God had established his covenant with his people. There is no indication that the Lord had instructed him to do this as he had previously directed him to go to Kerith (17:2–3) and to Zarephath (17:8–9) and to meet Ahab (18:1). (CSB)

The Lord who fed Elijah miraculously at the Kerith Ravine (1 Kings 17:5) and has numbered the hairs on our heads acted once again. When Elijah opened his eyes, there was some freshly baked bread and some water. (PBC)

19:8–14 Elijah had experiences similar to those of Moses: (1) on Horeb (Ex 3:1), both men went without food for the same length of time (Ex 34:28); (2) Elijah stood “at the entrance of the cave”; Moses was in “a cleft of the rock” when the Lord’s glory passed by (v 13; Ex 33:22); (3) Elijah “wrapped his face in his cloak”; Moses “hid his face” at the burning bush (v 13; Ex 3:6). (TLSB)

19:8 *forty days and forty nights.* Sustained by the Lord as Moses had been for the same length of time on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:18; 34:28) and as Jesus would be in the desert (Mt 4:2, 11). (CSB)

in the strength. Well nourished, Elijah begins an extreme fast. (TLSB)

Horeb, the mountain of God. † An alternate name for Mount Sinai (see Ex 3:1; 19:1–3), located in the desert apparently about 250 miles south of Beersheba. (CSB)

This is the place where God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses some 700 years earlier. Just imagine: the discouraged prophet had now traveled over 300 miles on foot, most of it through inhospitable desert country. (PBC)

This was the mount of God. Like Moses before him, he was miraculously preserved by God. Note: It happens time and again that faithful pastors become weary and distressed when they see that their earnest labors bring so little fruit. But God always has strength for them in His Word and in the power of His Spirit. (Kretzmann)

19:1–8 Elijah becomes a wanted man, as Queen Jezebel seeks to kill him. He flees into the wilderness to Mount Horeb, where centuries earlier, Moses had received the Ten Commandments. At times, believers may feel the need to flee from those who would destroy them because of their Christian faith and their profession of that faith. Will it come to that in our land? Even if it does, we can be sure that the Lord will always be with us, patiently blessing us with His love, mercy, and grace. • Almighty God, You are the refuge for Your people in times of trouble. We trust You with all our needs. In Jesus' name. Amen. (TLSB)

The Lord Appears to Elijah

⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” ¹⁵ The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

19:9-14 The question on vv. 9 and 13 evokes the confession in vv. 10 and 14, illustrating the persistence of both the Lord and Elijah. In verse 18, the Lord provides information that undermines Elijah's evaluation of his circumstance. (TLSB)

19:9 *What are you doing here, Elijah?* The question implies that Elijah had come to Sinai for his own misguided reasons and not because the Lord had sent him. (CSB)

This may have the implication that Elijah is outside his province and is somewhere he really doesn't belong. (CSB)

Men are made not merely to be acted upon but to act, and should never voluntarily go where they can do nothing. (CB)

19:10 VERY ZEALOUS FOR THE LORD – He was desirous of honoring the Lord by leading the people to obey him. (CB)

Elijah did not give a direct answer to the Lord's question but implied that the work the Lord had begun centuries earlier with the establishment of the Sinai covenant had now come to nothing. Whereas Moses had interceded for Israel when they sinned with the golden calf (Ex 32:11–13), Elijah condemned the Israelites for breaking the covenant, and bitterly complained over the fruitlessness of his own work.

only one left. See note on 18:22. (CSB)

Elijah reveals the extent of his loneliness and sense of abandonment. (TLSB)

Men are never more likely to boast of their past labors, than when they are neglecting their present duty; nor ever more likely to complain, find fault with others, and sink into despair. (CB)

19:11 LORD IS ABOUT TO PASS BY – This language is like that of Exodus 33-34. Just as God passes before Moses, so now God passes by Elijah in an act of revelation. That Elijah approaches Moses' stature is reinforced by their joint appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

WIND..EARTHQUAKE..FIRE – God had sent one or more of these before in his judgment of people. He had used a mighty wind to separate the waters of the Red Sea and had then drowned the Egyptian soldiers when the water came crashing back together. God had sent fire from heaven to destroy the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God was not yet about to deal with his people according to the Law. God was not coming to Elijah with threats and anger but with patience and love, with gentleness and mercy. (PBC)

At times, God had manifested Himself in phenomena of nature, e.g., wind (Ezk 1:4), earthquake (Nu 16:31), fire (Ex 19:18). (TLSB)

19:12 *gentle whisper*. In the symbolism of these occurrences (vv. 11–12) the Lord appears to be telling Elijah that although his servant’s indictment of Israel was a call for God to judge his people with windstorm, earthquake and fire, it was not God’s will to do so now. Elijah must return to continue God’s mission to his people, and Elisha is to carry it on for another generation (v. 16). (CSB)

The word “whisper” also occurs in Job 4:16 (hushed voice) and in Ps. 107:29 (the Lord stilled the storm “to a whisper”). The adjective “gentle” reinforces what is already present in the noun. This adjective is used elsewhere to describe the “thin” flakes of manna (Ex 16:14), the “thin” hair of a diseased person (Lev 13:30), finely ground altar incense (Lev 16:12, and the malnourished “thing” stalks of the seven lean years (Gen 41:6). It is singularly used in our text to modify a sound. God reveals himself to Elijah in a way that strikes awe in him. Through a quiet voice God gave spiritual strength to Elijah. Through that same quiet word God still today continues to save sinners and to restore the souls of his troubled people. The important question is whether we are willing to see him as he promises in his Word to reveal himself – as opposed to setting up our own expectations. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

We may draw a distinction between a Law revelation with obvious power, versus a Gospel revelation that comes quietly. The “theology of glory” looks for God to appear in dramatic visible forms. In contrast, the “theology of the cross” is an incarnational theology of humiliation. It looks for God hidden in Jesus, the man of sorrows, and today cloaked in Word and Sacrament. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

Elijah found no comfort and no assurance in God’s power manifested in nature through the wind. Rather, when God’s Word came to instruct him in a quiet voice, then the prophet found truth and strength. What the Lord whispers is a mystery. Luther: “The Law is a hammer that crushes rocks, a fire, a wind, and a great and mighty earthquake that overturns mountains. When Elijah could not bear the terrors of the Law that were signified by these events, he wrapped his head in his mantle; and after the storm he had seen was over, there came a still small voice, in which the Lord was present. But the violence of the fire, the storm, and the earthquake had to come first, before the Lord Himself followed in the still small voice’ (AE 26:310-11) (TLSB)

It is not always that which is most visible and tangible, or which makes the most noise, that is most efficacious in doing good. (CB)

19:13 PULLED HIS CLOAK OVER HIS FACE – Perhaps expressing shame. (TLSB)

WENT OUT – Perhaps the whisper called him out. (TLSB)

What are you doing here, Elijah? After demonstrating his presence in the gentle whisper rather than in the wind, earthquake or fire, the Lord gave Elijah an opportunity to revise the answer he had previously given to the same question (vv. 9–10). (CSB)

19:14 Elijah's unrevised answer demonstrated that he did not understand the significance of the divine revelation he had just witnessed. (CSB)

I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT – As a matter of fact, Elijah had not been a failure. The God who sees into our hearts and who “knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19) still had 7000 faithful followers in Israel (verse 18). (PBC)

19:15-17 Many miles north of Israel. *Hazael ... Jehu ... Elisha*. In a renewed battle against idolatry, Elijah was to anoint these men. Elijah personally recruited Elisha (vv 19–21), who in turn carried out the commands concerning Hazael and Jehu (2Ki 8:7–15; 9:1–10). (TLSB)

19:15 *The LORD said to him*. Giving instructions to Elijah that revealed his sovereign power over people and nations. Even though Israel would experience divine judgment through Hazael, Jehu and Elisha, God would continue to preserve a remnant faithful to himself among the people. In the coming verse God will give a threefold assignment. (CSB)

GO BACK THE WAY YOU CAME – God here is correcting Elijah's earlier conclusion that his prophetic ministry was finished; God still has use and purpose for his prophet. God shows compassion by not scolding Elijah for self-piteous whining. Instead, God upholds the weary prophet, listens to his plight, reveals himself and speaks to him, then return the prophet to his holy tasks. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

go to the Desert of Damascus. Apparently Elijah is to go back by way of the road east of the Dead Sea and the Jordan. As it turns out, all three anointings take place east of the Jordan, though it is Elisha who effects the anointing of the two kings. (CSB)

anoint. Appears to mean here no more than “designate as divinely appointed.” This anointing was actually done by Elijah's successor Elisha (see 2Ki 8:7–15). (CSB)

Hazael. Subsequently became a serious threat to Israel during the reigns of Joram, Jehu and Jehoahaz (see 2Ki 8:28–29; 10:32–33; 12:17–18; 13:3, 22). (CSB)

God can work inside and outside of the earthly realms of his kingdom. Here and outsider is used to help bring God's punishment upon Israel. (PBC)

If the people of God, when fearful, discouraged, and desponding, would get out of trouble, they must go to work; what their hands find to do, they must do for the purpose of honoring God and doing good, committing themselves and their interests to His guidance and disposal. (CB)

19:16 *anoint Jehu*. Jehu was a military commander under Ahab and Joram, Ahab's son (2Ki 9:5–6). He was anointed king over Israel by a “man from the company of the prophets” at the instruction of Elisha (2Ki 9:1–16), with the mandate to destroy the house of Ahab. (CSB)

Called the “son of Omri” on an Assyrian black obelisk that lists his tribute paid to Assyria, because Israel was known as the land of Omri. The low-relief carving shows Jehu bowed on his knees before Shalmaneser III. (TLSB)

Elisha. As with Elijah (see note on 17:1), Elisha’s name (meaning “God is salvation” or “God saves”) was the essence of his ministry. His name evokes memory of Joshua (“The LORD saves”). Elijah is given someone to finish his work just as Moses was, and Elisha channels the covenant blessings to the faithful in Israel just as Joshua brought Israel into the promised land (see the account of Elisha’s ministry in 2Ki 2:19–8:15; 9:1–3; 13:14–20). In the NT John the Baptist (“Elijah,” Mt 11:14; 17:12) was followed by Jesus (“Joshua”; see NIV text note on Mt 1:21) to complete God’s saving work. (CSB)

son of Shaphat. Shaphat means “He judges,” which is also in accordance with Elisha’s ministry. (CSB)

from Abel Meholah. Like Elijah, Elisha was from beyond the Jordan. (CSB)

Elisha’s home was c 2 mi E of the Jordan and c 25 mi S of the Sea of Chinnereth. (TLSB)

SUCCEED YOU AS PROPHET – The Lord acknowledges Elijah’s exhaustion and plans for his relief, while ensuring the continuation of the ministry. (TLSB)

19:17 *Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael.* See 2Ki 9:24. (CSB)

Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. How this may have been fulfilled we are not told, but see 2Ki 2:24; 8:1 (see also Hos 6:5). (CSB)

They would all be instrumental in the punishment of idolatrous Israel. (CB)

19:18 *seven thousand.* A round number, no doubt symbolic of the fullness or completeness of the divinely preserved godly remnant (Ro 11:2–4). In any case Elijah had been mistaken in his conclusion that he alone had remained faithful (see vv. 10, 14; 18:22). (CSB)

Although many were to die by the sword of Hazael and Jehu, for whose rise to power Elisha was responsible (v. 17), a large number would be found in Israel who did not succumb to the seduction of Baal worship. “The godless priests in Judah held a false belief about such sacrifices; Baal worship continued in Israel. Nevertheless, a Church of God was there that objected to these godless services” (Ap XXIV 98). Luther: “This adequate evidence that size does not make the church. Nor dare one consider how holy its origin is, who its ancestors are, and what they have in their possession and have received from God” (AE 2:101). Mel: “In the time of Elijah the church consisted of Elijah, Elisha, and their hearers, and the church was not without ministry. For the

prophets themselves were the ministers of the Gospel and there were some godly priests with them” (Chem, LTh 2:685). (TLSB)

not kissed him. See Hos 13:2. (CSB)

It was customary to kiss the statues of the idols. So Elijah was by no means the only true believer left, as the Lord, who knows those who are His, assured him. In the midst of a godless world He has His small crew, a small flock, indeed, but nevertheless loyal to Him. (Kretzmann)

Some good men are at times tempted to think that there are none who labor in the right way to sustain the cause of God but themselves and that when they are gone it must sink. But he will show that it is not as dependent on them as they thought it was. (CB)

19:9–18 When Elijah is discouraged, the Lord comes to him in a “low whisper,” encouraging him that he is not alone and commissioning him to return to his God-given ministry. God’s voice speaks to us in the quietness of the inspired pages of Scripture, by which He encourages us with the forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus, the Word made flesh. • I thank You, dear God, that in the pages of the Bible, You have come with the assuring whisper of Your presence and protection. In the gentle Savior’s name. Amen. (TLSB)

The Call of Elisha

19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. ²⁰ Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,” he said, “and then I will come with you.” “Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?” ²¹ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

19:19 SHAPHAT – Elisha’s family lived east of the Jordan, perhaps in the territory of Gad. (TLSB)

TWELVE YOKE OF OXEN – Remarkable coordination of effort, guiding a team of 24 animals. (TLSB)

threw his cloak around him. Thus designating Elisha as his successor (see note on v. 16). (CSB)

Not all of us get the mantle of doing full-time church work. But have all been clothed with the robe of righteousness of Christ in our baptism. We don’t have to turn our backs to our current ways of making a living but in fact use our positions in life to witness to God’s love and mercy. (PBC)

Designating Elisha as his successor. Ephraim Syrus: “Elijah also was persecuted as Jesus was persecuted. Jezebel the murderess persecuted Elijah; and the persecuting and murderous congregation persecuted Jesus. Elijah restrained the heavens from rain because of the sins of Israel; and Jesus by His coming restrained the Spirit from the prophets, because of the sins of the people. Elijah destroyed the servants of Baal; and Jesus trampled upon Satan and his hosts. Elijah raised to life the son of widow; and Jesus raised to life the son of widow, as well as Lazarus and the daughter of the ruler of the Synagogue. Elijah sustained the widow with a little bread; and Jesus satisfied thousands with a little bread. Elijah was taken up in a chariot to heaven; and our Redeemer ascended and took His seat on the right hand of His Father. Elisha received the spirit of Elijah; and Jesus breathed upon the faces of His Apostles” (NPNF2 13:398) (TLSB)

19:20 GO BACK – This was probably said to try the firmness of his purpose. (CB)

WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU – Idiomatic question, explaining that the call to discipleship was not intended to conflict with respect for parents. (TLSB)

God can at any time so touch the hearts of men that they will voluntarily and cheerfully leave all for him and his cause. But in doing this, he will not lessen their natural affection, or lead them to neglect any of the proper kindnesses and courtesies of life. 1 Peter 3:8 (CB)

19:21 *slaughtered them ... burned the plowing equipment.* Elisha’s break with his past vocation was complete, though he obviously came from a wealthy family. (CSB)

By killing his oxen he was saying with his actions that he was done with farming and was going to be Elijah’s successor even though it must have been overwhelming. This is reminiscent of when Jesus called some of his disciples. (PBC)

Elisha turned the situation into a sacred feast, perhaps a fellowship meal. (TLSB)

attendant. In Hebrew the same designation as used for Joshua’s relationship to Moses (“aide,” Ex 24:13; 33:11). (CSB)

19:19–21 Elijah casts his cloak on Elisha, who will succeed him in God’s work. Let us, in the time we have on earth, lay the calling of God’s Word on the shoulders of the next generation. As God raises up Elisha to follow in Elijah’s footsteps, so He is now raising up faithful servants of the Gospel to minister to this generation and the next. • God of the prophets, bless the prophets’ sons—all who proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Bless them with courage as they proclaim Your Word to the ends of the earth. Amen. (TLSB)