

## REVIEWING 1 KINGS 19 IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

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### **Abstract**

This article reviews in contemporary scholarship the story of Prophet Elijah's flight from the threats of Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings 19. The article identifies the features of this pattern which are restricted in this account, and adduces the distinctive characteristics of the example under discussion which deviate from the pattern and so help to elucidate the significance of Elijah's experience and the evaluation of the figure of the Prophet. Against this background, the presenter adopts rhetorical and phenomenological approaches to explore and study the concept validity of every relevant dimension of the subject under consideration. This model led to a case presentation analysis, which most probably offers further insights to the understanding of the cause, context, content and aims of the subject matter. The discussion distinguishes between two journeys described in this chapter: the flight to the desert (verses 1-8a) and the journey to Horeb (verses 8b-21). The researcher found out that the best of men have their defects, hence should not be despised on that account seeing that God in each situation redirected them to go their way. It is recommended that the narrative should not be interpreted literarily but as a common pattern in the Old Testament genre. However, lessons inherent in such accounts should be applied for contemporary relevance.

### **Introduction**

Elijah is identified at his first appearance (1 Kings 17:1) as "Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the sojourners of Gilead." Thus his native place must have been called Tishbeh. A Tishbeh (Thisbe) in the territory of Naphtali is known from Tobit 1:2; but if (with most modern commentators) the reading of the Septuagint in 1 Kings is followed, the word translated "sojourners" is itself "Tishbeh," locating the place in Gilead and making the prophet a native of that mountain region and not merely a "sojourner" there. He was acclaimed a prophet who fought for God. The hope of Elijah completing his victory over the idolaters and overthrowing the worship of Baal in the capital of the kingdom of Israel, with which he may have hastened to Jezreel, was frustrated by the malice of the queen, who was so far from discerning any revelation of the Almighty God in

the account given her by Ahab of what had occurred on Carmel, and bending before His mighty hand, that, on the contrary, she was so full of wrath at the slaying of the prophets of Baal as to send to the prophet Elijah to threaten him with death.

This is a sad sequel to the triumph on Mount Carmel. Elijah had forgotten Jezebel. She, though absent on Mount Carmel, had received with sceptical scorn the reports which had reached her. The fire from heaven she looked upon as a mere conjurer's trick. For her, the rain following the prophet's prayer was a mere coincidence, and, like all others who speak so glibly of coincidences, she never asked what power had made the two events coincide. So she felt utter contempt for the cowards who had stood by while her prophets were butchered by a madman. In a passionate fury she declared that she was no turncoat to forsake the gods of her fathers at the bidding of a wild Bedouin. If no one else had the courage to withstand Elijah, she would do it herself. So the letter was sent which made the prophet flee.<sup>1</sup>

Some early commentators<sup>2</sup> detected in this threat the *impotentiamuliebrisiracundiae*, and saw that all that Jezebel wanted was to get rid of the man who was so distressing and dangerous to her, because she felt herself unable to put him to death, partly on account of the people, who were enthusiastic in his favour, and partly on account of the king himself, upon whom the affair at Carmel had not remained without its salutary effect. But how strange is it that Elijah should face 850 angry prophets and not be afraid, and then run away from the threats of one woman!

According to Keil and Delitzsch<sup>3</sup> this seeming failure of his ministry was the occasion of a severe inward conflict, in which Elijah was brought to a state of despondency and fled from the land. The Lord allowed His servant to pass through this conflict, that he might not exalt himself, but, being mindful of his own impotence, might rest content with the grace of his God, whose strength is mighty in the weak (2 Corinthians 12:8-9), and who would refine and strengthen him for the further fulfilment of his calling.

The Elijah narratives in the first book of Kings portray the prophet in continual motion.<sup>4</sup> This article examines the story of Elijah's flight from Jezebel and with the hope to demonstrate that this chapter (19) belongs to a previously unidentified literary pattern in the Hebrew Bible, namely, the 'leave-taking' story. A number of issues and enigmas arise from a close reading of the text. These include: The impression that Elijah's departure is incommensurate with the immediate danger arising from Jezebel's threats. The sudden appearance of the servant and the reason why Elijah leaves him at Beersheba. The seeming contradiction between Elijah's departure in order to save his life and his plea for

God to take it. The fact that Elijah continues his journey, the significance of the reference to 'Beersheba, which is in Judah', and the question whether he sets out for Horeb or reaches the mountain by chance. The significance of the theophany at Horeb, including the fact that it occurs at the conclusion of Elijah's prophetic ministry. The meaning of Elijah's words at the theophany and their relation to the prior revelation on Mount Carmel.

### **Situating the literary genre of the narrative:**

These issues are best resolved by identifying literary genre contained in the narrative.<sup>5</sup> They can be identified in the following features:

1. A description of the protagonist's setting which frequently includes uncertainty regarding its nature as enterprise, flight, or expulsion.
2. A sense of fear and worry, manifested by the attribution of the term *hary* to the protagonist.
3. The reaching of a sacred spot generally depicted as an intentional, but occasionally as a chance, arrival, the place in most cases already being considered holy but at times becoming so in the wake of the event thus adding an aetiological weight to the story. Either prior or subsequent to the protagonist's advent, his/her farewell from those accompanying is generally noted.
4. Revelation and prayer, which assume diverse forms and frequently occur in parallel: an explicit request; the voicing of distress, sometimes accompanied by an expression of profound despair out of which the plea arises; verbal divine revelation; divine revelation in a vision; or simply arrival at a sacred place. The traveller generally prays for protection from the dangers of the journey, those facing any wayfarer, or those attendants upon this specific journey. This feature customarily constitutes the watershed in the story, transforming the protagonist's circumstances. Frequently, his/her prayer constitutes the catalyst for the continuation of his/her journey.
5. Divine response-which includes a commitment to accompany and safeguard the protagonist and bless his/her offspring and land and return the traveller to his/her home. Frequently, the wayfarer's physical needs are also related to.
6. The divine reply to the protagonist's prayer which on occasion is also demonstrated practically in addition to the verbal response. This reaction is often marked by significations regarding the historical import of the event and the establishment there of a memorial for future generations. In numerous narratives, this element receives 'objective' expression external to the story in the form of name-giving: to a place, as in 'hence the town came to be called Zoar' (Genesis 19:7), or to offspring, as in 'the older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites today' (Genesis 19:37). These names do not match the date of the story and are designed to constitute memorials for future generations.

7. A description of the continuation of the journey intended, together with the account of the original setting forth, to create a structural framework at the centre of which lies the revelation and prayer scene. This element is sometimes accompanied by a depiction of the protagonist's arrival at his/her destination and on occasion also his/her return to the point of departure.

In this article, the writer examined the features of the genre in relation to Elijah's flight from Jezebel. At first glance, the narrator of 1 Kings 19 appears to be seeking to create an antithesis between the beginning and end of the text, the chapter commencing with Jezebel's pursuit of Elijah and concluding with Elisha's following after Elijah to serve him. The turning point in Elijah's state is given concrete expression by a physical change in direction southward to northward-instigated by the divine command: 'Go back <sup>2</sup>bwv \$il)' (verse 15). The same phrase is used in reference to Moses' flight from Pharaoh (Exodus 4:19).<sup>6</sup> This correspondence may be designed to highlight the disparity between the two figures, however, since Moses' flight occurs before he has taken up his prophetic office, his geographical return thus signifying the inception of his prophetic and executive role. In contrast, Elijah's 'retreat' takes place following the very significant act of his commissioning as a prophet, in consequence of which 'all the people flung themselves on their faces and cried out: "The Lord alone is God, the Lord alone is God!"' (1 Kings 18:39).

These disparities suggest that Elisha's following after Elijah at the end of the chapter does not symbolise Elijah's return/restoration but an extension of his estrangement. While in the opening verses the prophet is (merely) geographically distanced from the place towards which his prophecy is directed, at the closure of the extended unit he is (also) removed from his prophetic role. This rupture gives a tangible expression in Elisha's appointment as his successor. On this reading, Elijah's 'redirection' represents a provisional restoration only, for the purpose of appointing his replacement.<sup>7</sup>

Like the previous chapters in this section (chapters 17-18), 1 Kings 19 is characterised by doublets, repetitions, and recurrent elements and motifs. Since the very act of departure is depicted twice, the writer discusses each of these units separately. In the following section, he examines the initial 'day's journey'-flight into the desert (vv. 1-8a) and the 'forty days' journey to the mountain of God at Horeb (verses 8b-21).<sup>8</sup>

### **Elijah's retreat into the desert (1 Kings 19.1-8a)**

The LXX, Peshitta, and a number of MT manuscripts read *aryyw* 'and he feared', in place of the *aryw* 'and he saw'.<sup>9</sup> While this anxiety naturally reflects Elijah's apprehension over Jezebel's concrete threats- 'if by this time tomorrow I have not made you like one of them' (verse 2f) it also expresses the sense of

apprehension which so frequently characterises those setting forth on a journey. The difference in reading ‘and he saw’ (MT) and ‘he was afraid’ is of decisive significance for understanding the nature of Elijah’s retreat. According to the translations, Elijah flees because of the immediate threat to his life. The MT, however, indicates that Elijah perceived his circumstances and determined to take action-to get up and set forth. The latter reading contains no hint of the panic characteristic of flight in the face of concrete and direct danger to life, such as intimated in Jezebel’s warning: ‘if by this time tomorrow...’<sup>10</sup> The absence of a sense of fear is also suggested by the numerous verbs employed in the continuation of his journey: %l,YEãw: ‘~q'Y''w: ‘He got up and went’ (verse 3),%l:Üh'-aWh)w> ‘And he went’ (verse 4), and again%l,YE÷w:... ~q'Y''ßw: ‘He got up...and walked’ (verse 8).<sup>11</sup> The lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of the journey in this account - flight or self-initiated departure -is characteristic of several biblical departure narratives. The uncertainty regarding the nature of Elijah’s leave-taking extend; to the description of his forty days’ walkbrE(xo ~yhibl{a/h' rh:ï d[<sup>2</sup> ‘as far as the mountain of God at Horeb’ (verse 8). It seems this part of his journey can be understand as a direct continuation of his journey from Jezebel, the danger from her threats not yet having subsided while he was still~Ayë %r<D<ä ‘a day’s journey’ from Beersheba (verse 4), It may also represent a journey of intent, however, designed to bring him to the place where God revealed himself to Moses and made his first covenant with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Like others who set forth on a journey, the protagonist frequently halt; and enters a sacred spot-in apparent deviation from his attempt to remove himself as quickly as possible from the threat to his life. Elijah’s stop at Beersheba ‘which is in Judah’ can be viewed as just such an illogical stop, since if Jezebel’s band could no longer reach him in Beersheba he had no need to continue his journey into the desert-a place likely to cause him great suffering, as the text indicates with jarring simplicity: tWmêl' ‘Avp.n:-ta, la;Ûv.Ylw: Îdx'\_a,Ð ðtx'a,À ~t,roãtx;T;Pbv,YE''w: aboŞY''w: ‘He came to a broom bush and sat down under it, and prayed that he might die’ (verse 4). The passage thus makes it clear that, despite having passed into Judah, Elijah is still fearful of being caught by Jezebel thus drives himself further into the desert. In light of this, it is possible to maintain that his halt at Beersheba as a way-station in the middle of his flight to a more isolated and safer place in the desert represents the standard motif of stopping at a holy site. In this context, the phrase xN:ïY:w: hd''\_Whyli( rv<ãa] [b;v,PraEiB. ‘which is in Judah’ (verse 3) may be inserted to emphasize the fact that Elijah stopped at Beersheba, a well-known sacred spot since the days of the Patriarchs.”<sup>13</sup>

Scholars and commentators have struggled to understand the reference to ~v'( Arß[]n:-ta,( xN:ïY:w: ‘and left his servant there’. Who was the servant whom Elijah leaves at Beersheba (verse 3) moreso when no such accompanying figure

has been referred to previously? The fact that this notation precedes the revelation/prayer scene, however, suggests that it represents the protagonist's farewell-taking from his companions.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. 'Enough! Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers'

While many scholars have sought weightier aspects than desert heat and thirst to explain Elijah's profound despair-to the point of asking 'that he might die' (verse 4) comparison of Elijah's afflictions with those of other figures in similar circumstances reveals that this constitutes a fixed motif. In Hagar's despair, she abandons her son 'under one of the bushes' (Genesis 21:15), implicitly acknowledging that he will not survive:dl,Y"+h; tAmâB. ha,Pr>a,-la; hr"êm.a'¥ 'Let me not look on as the child dies' (verse 16). When the Israelites reach the wilderness of Zin and are 'without water' (Numbers 20:2), they cry out in desperation: `hw")hy>ynEïp.liWnyxePa; [w:ïg>Bi Wn[w:±g" Wliw>rmoêaleWrâm.aYOW: hv,\_mo-~[i ~['Ph' br,Y"iw: 'And the people strove with Moses, and spoke, saying, *If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of the Lord!*' (verse 3). Jonah's ordeal is described in identical fashion to Elijah's: 'He begged for death (tWmêl' 'Avp.n:-ta, la;Ûv.Ylw:), saying, "*I would rather die than live*" ' (Jonah 4.8).<sup>15</sup>it seems the plea made by these figures does not represent a desire for death rather expresses the despair emanating precisely from their will to live. It is only in this wise that one can literal understand the cry of Elijah: yt'(boa)me ykiPnOa' bAji-al{-yKi(yviêp.n: xq:â 'hw"hy>hT'Û[; br:â 'Enough! Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers' (verse 4), is incommensurable with his attempts to escape Jezebel's threats on his life.<sup>16</sup>Nor does his complaint in the continuation-HT'(x.q;l.yviPp.n:-ta, Wvïq.b;y>w: 'they are out to take my life' (verses 10, 14)-in which his survival-wish is reflected; correspond to a literal comprehension of his words.

It appears that these formulations should not be adduced at voicing Elijah's prayer to die rather as an expression of resignation to the fact that he is likely to perish. His flight into the wilderness is intended to save his life, not to lose it, and represents his confidence in light of past experience, when God took care of his sustenance at the Brook of Cherith and Zarephath-that on this occasion also, he will provide for his needs in the course of his journey. One therefore asks: is it possible to think like Jonathan that having walked for several arduous days, he realises that this time he cannot rely on God's care, he despairs and asks '*that he might die*', thereby giving voice-in the most radical fashion to his intense misery.<sup>17</sup>Greenstein is rather of the opinion that understanding the statements made by Elijah and other figures (who fell into fits of depression) as a plea for death does not fit the continuation of any of the stories in which this motif occurs."<sup>18</sup>

The continuation of the passage contains further prayer;  $\text{yheäl}[\text{a}/\text{Yhw}^{\text{a}}\text{h}^{\text{y}}\text{l}]; \text{ytiaNE}^{\text{a}}\text{qiaNO}^{\text{a}}\text{q};$  'I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts' (verses 10, 14). Here, too, one is required to infer the essence of Elijah's plea from his complaint, as the researcher shall elucidate further. The impression the text gives is that, by noting Elijah's dual prayers of request-both of which focus on his distress and dissatisfaction rather than constituting direct articulation of his entreaty-the author endeavours to convey Elijah's extreme plight in having descended from 'a roof so high' on Mount Carmel to 'a pit as deep' in the wilderness at Beersheba.<sup>19</sup> It is reasonable to assume- without pre-empting the discussion of Elijah as a prophetic figure that this device is also intended to signify Elijah's harsh character, a person quick to complain despite all the goodness he has received from God.

On occasion, the wayfarer is satisfied with a sense of God's proximity and the company of his messengers. In other instances, the protagonist is not content with mere immediacy and company, demanding that God take care of his direct concrete needs. Elijah, whose profound despair derives both from the absence of God's accompanying presence-to which he has become so accustomed and from his hunger and thirst, receives on answer on both planes: 'Suddenly an angel touched him' (verse 5) and 'The angel of the Lord came a second time and touched him' (verse 7); and 'He looked about; and there, beside his head, was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water!' (verse 6). While the dual 'touching' of Elijah by the angel may be intended to illustrate the great depths of his anguish, it may also constitute an additional element in the series of repetitions characteristic of the narrative-and perhaps the group of stories as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

In blunt contrast to his 'success' on Mount Carmel and his running in front of Ahab, it seems Elijah's circumstances go from bad to worse until he reaches a point at which he pleads to God to take his life. In this deepest pit of desolation, he utters his first prayer: 'Enough! Now, O Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers' (verse 4). After this, his situation undergoes a radical transformation. Prior to his entreaty, he is incapable of even a 'day's journey into the wilderness' (verse 4); now, he undertakes a walk of 'forty days and forty nights' (verse 8). Before his plea, he is only able to reach 'a broom bush' and sit in its shade (verse 4);<sup>21</sup> subsequently, he travels 'as far as the mountain of God at Horeb' (verse 8). Prior to the prayer, he lacks the most basic survival needs, experiencing 'a hunger for bread (and) a thirst for water'; after it, he merits 'hearing the words of the Lord' in the most exalted voice of all-'the word of the Lord' (verse 9; cf. Amos 8.11). This chain of events is consistent with that customarily found narratives, in which a turning point occurs in the wake of the protagonist's prayer.

The account of Elijah's flight into the wilderness (verses 1-8a)-at the heart of which stands his prayer, 'Enough! Now, O Lord, take my life' for I am no better than my fathers' (verse 4)concludes with a description of the extension of his journey: 'He walked...' As remarked above. This type of description constitutes a fixed element in the stories. On occasion, such an account also serves as the commencement of a new narrative-the way in which these verses should apparently be understood here.

This analysis of verses 1-8a as representing a biblical narrative has identified the following set of components: Elijah sets forth- either in flight or in enterpriseand interrupts his journey at a holy spot, Beersheba in Judah. There, he parts company from his servant-his companion; He prays to God, a plea consisting of an expression of his distress, out of which arises his request. He gains a response from the divinity, comprising a touch from the angel and the provision of his basic needs. Finally, he continues on his way, his prayer is seen as the turning point in the story.

The following pericope (verses 8b-21) appears to constitute a new section falling under the category of 'prophetic investiture' or, possibly, an account of the renewal of Elijah's prophetic calling.<sup>22</sup> Examination of the unit, however, indicates that it, too, is composed of the same elements as occur in the first passage. Elijah sets forth a second time on a journey, the description of this in verse 8 serving simultaneously as a depiction of the continuation of the first expedition and the initiation of a new one. He halts at a sacred spot, electing to rest at Horeb, the 'mountain of God', in similar fashion to Jacob's decision to repose at Bethel, the 'house of God'. He prays to God in an entreaty consisting of an expression of complaint, which gives rise to his request. He receives a divine answer, which addresses issues of restoration and continuity/succession, and proceeds on his way, his prayer on this occasion exceptionally not constituting a turning point in the narrative.

The identification of these features suggests that the second unit (verses 8b-21) should also be classified as a 'leave-taking' story rather than as a consecration narrative of one form or another. The pertinence of this categorisation is particularly evident from the conclusion of the chapter, which deals with Elisha's appointment as Elijah's successor an event clearly signifying the termination of Elijah's prophetic office. The difficulty in understanding a revelation which occurs towards the end of Elijah's prophetic ministry as a prophecy of dedication is obvious,<sup>23</sup> notwithstanding the fact that no sign of any other investiture prophecy exists in the text.<sup>24</sup> It appears that one should read the chapter as consisting of two distinct journey accounts, the first narrating Elijah's flight into the wilderness (verses 1-8a), the second his journey to the mountain of God at Horeb (verses 8b-21).



### Literary approaches in 1 Kings 17-19

The repetition of the seeming 'leave-taking' story corresponds to the numerous other duplications in the chapter:<sup>25</sup>

'He came to a broom bush and sat down under it' (verse 4)	'He lay down and fell asleep under the broom bush' (verse 5)
'Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat"... He ate and drank' (verses 5-6).	'The angel of the Lord came a "second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat"... He arose and ate and drank' (verses 7-8)
'Then the word of the Lord came to him. "Why are you here, Elijah?" He replied, "I am moved by zeal"...' (verses 9-10).	'Then a voice addressed him: "Why are you here Elijah? He answered: "I am moved by zeal..." (verses 13-14).
'He left the oxen and ran after Elijah' (v. 20).	'He...took the yoke of oxen and slaughtered them...Then he arose and followed Elijah' (verse 21)

These duplications are also consistent with the various repetitions in the other chapters in this section (1 Kings 17-18):

'Leave this place; turn eastward... I have commanded the ravens to feed you there' (17:3-4)	'Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon I have designated a widow there to feed you' (17:9)
'He cried out to the Lord and said: "O Lord my God..." (17:20)	'Then he cried out to the Lord, saying: "O Lord my God..." (17:21)
'They took the bull...and invoked Baal by name... But there was no sound, and none who responded' (18:26)	'So they cried out with a loud voice... There was no sound and none who responded or heeded' (18:28-29)

Such duplications and/or repetitions also appear in relation to utterances or acts occurring in different forms, such as: 'Then he stretched over the child three times' (17:21); 'Then he said, "Do it a second time"... "Do it a third time" ' (18:34); 'Answer me, O Lord, answer me' (18:37); 'The Lord alone is God, the Lord alone is God' (18:39); 'Seven times [Elijah] said...' (18:43); 'anoint Jehu...and anoint Elisha' (19:16). These examples indicate that this literary device exists in all the prayers in this section of 1 Kings:

1. Elijah's plea for the restoration to life of the child.
2. The prayers of the prophets of Baal.

3. Elijah's entreaty at the hour of the meal offering.
4. The prayer uttered by the people.
5. Elijah's supplications during his flight into the wilderness, the first of which deals with his immediate physical distress arising from the desert conditions (verse 4), the second, which occurs twice (verses 10, 14), relating to his personal and prophetic fate.<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain the precise significance of this literary feature beyond identifying it as a stylistic device intended to heighten the drama and emphasise the message to be conveyed, the duplication frequently broadening or strengthening the first occurrence.<sup>27</sup> In this framework, Elijah's prayers uttered in the course of his journey elaborate the transition from a plea for temporary, physical relief answered via 'a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water' (verse 6) to an entreaty for the success of his prophetic office and concern for a successor, met through the command to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, as well as by the pledge: 'I will leave in Israel seven thousand' (v. 18).<sup>28</sup>

### **Elijah's voyage to the Mount Horeb (verses 8b-21)**

As remarked above, verses 8b-21 serve both as a depiction of the continuation of Elijah's initial voyage and as an account of his setting forth on a second expedition. Since the text fails to note the motive for this extra excursion, it is difficult to determine whether it constitutes an extension of his flight or a departure for a fresh-unspecified-purpose.<sup>29</sup>

The classification of the second journey bears implications for another issue concerning which the author also refrains from elaborating. Does Elijah deliberately set out for the mountain of God at Horeb or does he reach it by chance? When compared with Old Testament literary approach of writing one finds that similar ambiguity occurs in the description of Moses' arrival at 'Horeb, the mountain of God' (Exodus 3:1).<sup>30</sup> In this respect, the text appears to be consciously modelled on the story of Jacob; 'Jacob...set out (%,YEßw:) for Haran. He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night (~v;\_ll, YEßw:)' (Genesis 28:10-11). Here, the description of the geographical location deliberately parallels the depiction of the place where God revealed himself to Moses: '...and came (abo±Y"w:) to Horeb, the mountain of God (hb'rE(xo ~yhiPl{a/h' rh:i-la,)' (Exodus 3:1). This correspondence is further underscored via the usage of similar language: '...he went (%,YEßw:) with the strength from that meals...as far as Horeb the mountain of God ('hb'rE(xo ~yhiPl{a/h' rh:i-la,)' There 'he went'(abo±Y"w:) into a cave, and stopped there for the night <sup>31</sup> (~v;\_ll, YEßw:) (verses 8-9).

All three figures-Jacob, Moses, and Elijah:

Set forth on a journey in response to a threatposed respectively by Esau, Pharaoh, and Jezebel.

Arrive, by design or chance, at a sacred spot-the house of God (Bethel) or the mountain of God (Horeb).<sup>32</sup>

Receive divine revelation, which includes reference to restoration.

In the continuation, they return to the place from where their flight had commenced.<sup>33</sup>

The prayer which Elijah utters here-articulated twice within the space of four verses-may be read in two different, possibly antithetical ways. According to the first interpretation, the prophet's complaint centres on himself and is summed up in the words, '*they are out to take my life*'. This grievance gives rise to entreaty for protection and deliverance.<sup>34</sup> On this reading, the lengthy preface which precedes these words-'I am moved by zeal for the Lord... I alone am left'-indicates declaration of 'commitment or dependence or aegis'. In Greenberg's formulation of the 'justification of request' motif, this is a characteristic feature of biblical prayers of supplication.<sup>35</sup> On the second exegesis, Elijah's objection focuses upon his prophetic commissioning, being encapsulated in the phrase,

*'for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword'*. On this reading, the final sentence, '*they are out to take my life*',

reflects Elijah's apprehension that injuring the prophet of God is tantamount to banning the one that sent him.<sup>36</sup>

Each of these alternative exegeses is consistent with one of the two types of biblical 'traveller's prayer'. As plea for the saving of life, the supplication corresponds to the prayer for welfare which seeks protection and defence against the dangers lurking on the way-as exemplified by Jacob's words:

*'...if he protects me on this journey that I am making'* (Genesis 28:20). As an entreaty for the success of Elijah's prophetic mission, it is analogous to the prayer of Abraham's servant: *'...if you would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged'* (Genesis 24:42).

The ambiguous nature of the entreaty appears to be intended to leave the reader with the question: Which entreaty is most appropriate here? This uncertainty leads to a further inability to determine an additional issue: Should Elijah be judged favourably or castigated? Does the prophet behave as someone whose whole being is committed to his prophetic task or is he a person whose

personal fears and desires take precedence over his divine commission? This uncertainty attends the remainder of the Elijah stories as in the oath he swears:  $\text{'yrl}b'd>yp\ddot{a}l.\sim ai \text{ yKiPrj}"+m'Wlj;\ddot{a}hL,aePh' \sim ynliV'h;hy<\pm h.yl\sim ai \text{ wyn}''\ddot{e}p'l. \text{yTid}>m;\ddot{a}l[ \text{rv}<\ddot{a}a] \text{'laer}''f.ylyhe\ddot{U}l\{a/ \text{hw}''\ddot{u}hy>-\gamma x;$  ‘*As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding*’ (1 Kings 17:1) which leaves the reader perplexed as to whether the ‘bidding’ is God’s or Elijah’s.<sup>37</sup> In articulating the statement in this form, the author may be seeking to arouse doubt in the reader regarding Elijah’s prophetic zeal.

The chiasmic repetition which appears in both prayers-‘*Enough!*’, (br:Ⓜ)‘*Now O Lord, take my life*’ ( $\text{yvi}\ddot{e}p.n: \text{xq}:\ddot{a} \text{'hw}''hy>hT'\ddot{U}l[;]$ ) (verse 4) and ‘*they are out to take my life*’ ( $\text{'HT}(x.q;l. \text{yvi}Pp.n:-ta, \text{Wvi}q.b;y>w.;)$ ) verses 10, 14 may be intended, first and foremost, to stress the identical focus of Elijah’s two prayers, namely, the concrete concern for survival and request for divine protection and providence. The two pleas demonstrate both linguistic similarity and analogous form, strengthening the premise that they address the same issue. On this reading, the second entreaty is imbued with a certain measure of irony, perhaps reinforced by the reiteration. In both cases, Elijah’s true request must be inferred from the statement of his condition.<sup>38</sup> While his initial response to God’s query-‘*Why are you here?*’ (verses 9, 13) adduces his ‘zeal for the Lord’ (verses 10, 14), he ultimately reveals that his true apprehension is that ‘they are out to take my life’ (verses 10, 14).<sup>39</sup>

This analysis is supposed by a comparison between the zeal attributed to Elijah on the one hand and Phineas on the other. While Phineas’s act is described by the statement ‘...he left the assembly; ...and came after the people of Israel’ (Numbers 25:7-8), Elijah is depicted as ‘Seeing, he arose and went’ (v. 3). Whereas Phineas is afraid of no one-neither the person from Israel, who was a ‘chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house’ (Numbers 25:14), nor the woman, the daughter of Zur, a ‘tribal head of an ancestral house in Midian’ (25.15), Elijah is greatly fearful of the king of Israel and even of his wife, the ‘daughter of Ethbaal of the Phoenicians’ (1 Kings 16: 3).

The critical Portrait of Elijah is further heightened by the frequent usage of the word “life (literary, soul), which serves as a *Leitwort* in this passage. In the majority of instances, the reference is to Elijah’s life; ‘your life/soul’ (verse 2), ‘like the life/soul of one of them’ (verse 2), ‘for his life/soul’ (verse 3), ‘asked for his life/soul’ (verse 4), ‘take my life/soul’ (verse 4) ‘my life/soul’ (verse 10). Throughout the chapter, Elijah’s concern for his own survival precedes and pre-empts his commitment to his prophetic office. This understanding is vital for apprehending the significance or the divine response to his prayer, which in effect informs him that his ministry has drawn to a close, with Elisha being selected as his successor.<sup>40</sup>

### Return/Restoration and Continuity/Posterity

The divine response that Elijah receives contains two frequently appearing motifs within 'leave-taking' stories: return/restoration and continuity/posterity. The first element generally relates to the restoration of the protagonist to a specific geographical location - his home and family.<sup>41</sup> Such physical reinstatement to one's place of origin symbolizes the conclusion of the journey and the return to normal life and routine.<sup>42</sup> While Elijah appears to win the blessing of 'going back' (verse 15), it is not in fact to his home but *'to your way'* (verse 15). It is a combination of l. particle preposition 'to' and *r,D*, common noun both singular construct suffix and 2nd person masculine singular. This has been variously interpreted as "way, road, distance, journey, manner".<sup>43</sup>

The element of continuity (posterity or succession) customarily refers to the birth of offspring.<sup>44</sup> While Elijah is favoured with the appointment of a successor, however, here, too, his case is exceptional. Rather than witnessing his own sons inheriting him, he passes the prophetic baton to 'Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah' (verse 16). This uncertain perpetuity may perhaps also be intimated by the term 'under you' (*^yT,(x.T;)*) (verse 16) where Elijah is meant to infer that Elisha will not be his heir but his replacement. Elijah's continuity thus does not indicate posterity-just as his 'return' is not a restoration. In contrast to other wayfarers, Elijah is guaranteed neither land, home nor family. Nor does he win the divine accompaniment pledged and given to others, or the protection deriving from such presence.<sup>45</sup>

This understanding of the divine response, as radically restricted and neglectful of Elijah's physical circumstances, fits well with the constrictive framework of the 'leave-taking' story. Just as Elijah's entreaty appears to have been uttered out of zeal 'for God' (verses 10, 14) but ultimately transpires to revolve around the saving of his own 'life/soul' (verses 10, 14), so the divine answer which commences with the characteristic clause 'Go back' customarily indicating full restoration and posterity is promptly exposed as partial and limited-'to your way' (verses 15). Against the background of the lack of guarantee of return (land) and perpetuity (family), Elijah's irritation with Elisha's perfectly reasonable request that he bid farewell to his family to the point at which he is ready, as it were, to violate the divine command: 'Go back. What have I done to you?' (verses 20) becomes more intelligible. Only when he is totally prepared to forfeit his fertile land and family 'And one shall think that this reference is to attest that, although Elisha's father was very rich, he left his father's house in order to serve Elijah'<sup>46</sup> does Elijah find the wherewithal to calm down.

The theophanic scene containing the divine response concludes with a description of the continuation of Elijah's journey: 'He set out from there'

(verse 19). The two accounts of his trek-‘he walked...as far as the mountain of God at Horeb’ (verse 8) and ‘He walked from there’ (verse 19) delimit the revelation which occurs between them and stress the fact that the events took place in the course of Elijah’s journeying. This device, examples of which also occur in the first narrative-‘He arose and went’ (v. 3); ‘He arose and... walked’ (verse 8) delineates the perimeters of the prayer sandwiched between these verses.

### **Conclusion**

Elijah’s flight from Jezebel may be seen as belonging to a previously unidentified literary genre in the Hebrew Bible. Presentation of various difficulties in reading 1 Kings 19 have rightly shown and indicated how these are resolved when the text is identified as a story. Features of this kind of literary genre attempt to illustrate they character of their main focus by means of a close reading of the passage. This positionis affirmed in the ways in which the Elijah narrative diverges from the standard literary model, disparities which, it was suggested, assist the reader in ascertaining the author’s purpose in general and his assessment of Elijah in particular.

Common in all the narratives in the Old Testament which share the same stylistic feature with that of Elijah’s narrative in 1 Kings 19 is the encouragement motif which each of the discouraged individuals received after their respective encounters with God. It depicts that God permits seemingly challenging situations to come the way of his servants probably to make them understand that without him they can achieve nothing of substantial value. This comes in handy as one considers that Prophet Elijah by the way he presented his message in 1 Kings 17:1 ... there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.

### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>U. R. Thomas, *The Biblical Illustrator* Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 Ages Software, Inc. and BibleSoft, Inc.)

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> See for example 1 Kings 17.5, 10; 18.2, 46; 19.3, 8, 19; 2 Kings 1.15; 2.1.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of this literary genre, see M. Roi, ‘The Wayfarer’s Prayer in the Bible and the Literary Expressions of the Genre of “Departure on a Journey” Stories’ (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2010 [Hebrew]), pp. 332-37.

<sup>6</sup> Numerous scholars have noted the affinities between Moses and Elijah: see, e.g., F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 191-94; G.W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine:*

Theophany in Biblical Narrative (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), p. 207; P.J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), pp. 141-144. The latter (p. 141) also points to the parallelism between Pharaoh and Ahab

<sup>7</sup> . Elisha's anointing appears to close the section of Elijah narratives in 1 Kings 17-19. The remainder of the stories relating to Elijah-Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), the confrontation with Ahaziah's messengers (2 Kings 1), and Elijah's ascent to heaven (2 Kings 2)-should be regarded as inserted by an editorial hand; see U. Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives* (trans. L. Schamm; New York: Association of American University Presses, 1997), pp. 155-226; Gray, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 366; M. Cogan, *1 Kings* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 457 n. 3. The references to the anointing of Hazael and Ith in this chapter may also serve as a transition from the Elisha narratives; see, e.g., Montgomery. *The Books of Kings*, pp. 314-315; J. Robinson, *The First Book of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 221-222.

<sup>8</sup> Numerous scholars divide the chapter in such a fashion, ascribing the two accounts to different traditions: see, e.g., G.H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), II, p. 329; V. Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (trans. A. Hagedorn; Minneapolis: Abingdon Press, 2003), pp. 452-453.

<sup>9</sup> 6. See, e.g., Montgomery, *The Books of Kings*, p. 312; Cogan, *1 Kings*, p. 449; and the English versions which translate 'was afraid' (NEE, RSV). Simon (*Reading Prophetic Narratives*, pp. 249-250) strengthens this claim by pointing out the absence of an object « direct or indirect-customarily expected to follow 'And he saw' in explication of what precisely Elijah observed which caused him to flee. Cf. 'When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating...she took of its fruit and ate' (Genesis 3:6).

<sup>10</sup> Cogan (*1 Kings*, pp. 450-451) argues that the fact that the messenger comes to threaten Elijah leads him to understand that Jezebel is not truly seeking to kill him but merely to remove him from her way, citing in support of this contention Skinner's argument that the sending of the messenger in effect constitutes 'a confession of impotence' to harm Elijah by Jezebel following the incident on Mount Carmel.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz (*1 & 2 Kings*, p. 196) assumes that, in light of the casual description of Elijah's departure, this passage reflects a tradition earlier than that of his flight from Jezebel, being incorporated into the account of Elijah's confrontation with Jezebel at a later stage. Jones (*1 and 2 Kings*, p. 329) points out the disparities between the depiction of the panicked flight in vv. 1-3a and the straightforward departure in verses 2b onwards: in the first, Elijah flees alone, while in the second he is accompanied by his servant; in the first, he flees for his life, while in the second he pleads with God to take it. In light of these divergences, he proposes that the section should be ascribed to two independent traditions unified at a secondary stage. In my opinion, these differences do not

railedseparate traditions but express the uncertainty characteristic of 'departure on a journey' stories.

<sup>12</sup> See Leithart, 1 & 2 Kings, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup>The reference to 'Beersheba, which lay in Judah' may possibly have M included in order to remind the reader of God's words of exhortation there to Jacob: 'Fear not' (Gen. 26:24; 46:3)-in similar fashion to mild expressions in the chapter designed to recall, perhaps, another story dealing with God's revelation to Jacob in the course of the latter's journey: 'he lay down (:DW1)' (v. 5), 'beside his head (mummy (v. 6), 'there he spent the night (DID 15'1)' (v. 9 all of which correspond to events occurring during Jacob's journey (Gen. 28.11). H. Gunkel (Elias, Jahve und Baal [Tiibingem MOM, 1906], p. 22) draws a parallel between Elijah's traveling in the wilderness close to Beer-sheba and Hagar's walking in the 'wilderness of Beersheba' (Gen. 21.14). Like Isaac and Jacob-and perhaps also Abraham who 'invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God'-it is precisely here that Hagar receives a divine revelation.

<sup>14</sup> See Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, p. 214; R.D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987) p. 126. The latter proposes that the parting from the servant is intended both to leave Elijah alone when God reveals himself and to enable Elisha to succeed him. Cf. G. Savran ('Theophany as Type Scene', *Prooftexts* 23 [2003], pp. 119-49 [126-28]), who understands the protagonist's separation as constituting the 'setting of the scene' preceding the divine revelation.

<sup>15</sup> Jonah expresses the terror of his circumstances in the words: ' "Yes", he replied, "[I am so deeply grieved about the plant] that I want to die" ' (Jonah 4.9); see M.I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 1, pp. 373-374. Jones (1 and 2 Kings, p. 330) draws a comparison between Elijah's request and that made by Moses: 'If you would deal thus with me, kill me, rather, I beg you...' (Numbers 11:15). While constituting a legitimate analogy, the present discussion focuses on those cases in which the request derives from the physical needs attendant on travelling through the wilderness in order to elucidate the features of this type of ordeal. While Moses' words lead to a similar conclusion-'kill me, rather'-their motivation differs: 'I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me' (v. 14). This substantial variance is also exemplified in the nature of the divine response: while Moses is answered by the delegation of the S/spirit invested in him to the 'elders of the people', Elijah is met with 'a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water' (verse 6). It is difficult to ignore the significant difference between the two types of divine response which, more than reflecting the alternative forms of adversity visiting the two men embodies their disparate spiritual level, Elijah's plea corresponding more closely to the divine response to the people's appeal than to Moses' petition.



<sup>16</sup> See Simon (Reading Prophetic Narratives, p. 250), who, in addressing this issue, suggests: 'It is not easy to reconcile Elijah's journey into the depths of the wilderness, so as to die there, with his previous flight to Beersheva to save his life'. In his efforts to resolve the contradiction, Simon proposes separating Elijah's flight from Jezebel-a 'decisiveness in the political arena (his conflict with the queen)' and his 'despair on an existential plane (his conflict with himself)'.

<sup>17</sup> See T. Jonathan to 1 Kings 19.4: 1-13 -'The wait is too long for me; how long must I wander thus?' According to this rendering, Elijah's complaint relates to the ordeal(s) of the journey.

<sup>18</sup> See E. Greenstein, 'The Riddle of Samson', *Proof texts I* (1981), pp. 237-60, who relates to the words of other biblical figures, such as Jeremiah and Job, noting that Samson constitutes the sole exception in meriting an affirmative answer to his request: 'Let me die with the Philistines!' (Judges 16.30) (p. 242).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. b. Haggai 5b.

<sup>20</sup> See below.

<sup>21</sup> According to Gersonides' (Mikra 'ot Gedolot Haketer, ad [00.]): 'This is a tree of abjection', Cf. also Nelson (First and Second Kings, p. 126), who relates to the psychological aspect of Elijah's sitting alone under the bush.

<sup>22</sup> 19. Thus, for example, Nelson, First and Second Kings, p. 123. In contrast G. Hentschel (Die Elijah-Erzählungen [Leipzig St Benno, 1977], pp. 99-104) denies the unit as a 'prophetic complaint' corresponding to the 'songs of complaint' in the Psalms and Jeremiah.

<sup>23</sup> Simon (Reading Prophetic Narratives, p. 158) notes the difficulty inherent in this text: 'Even murkier is the link between the theophany and the broader context in which it appears: the tire that descended on Mount Carmel, which precedes it, and the punishment of destruction, which follows it'.

<sup>24</sup> Wellhausen, Gunkel, and others assume that the abrupt form of Elijah's appearance 'J Elijah the Tishbite said...' (1 Kings 17.1) signifies a lacuna containing a description of the beginning of Elijah's prophetic office, possibly including an account of his consecration; see J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der Historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 3rd edition, 1963), p. 287; Gunkel, *Elias, Jahve und Baal*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> It should be stressed that I am not dealing here with verbatim linguistic expressions, such as 'He arose and went' (verses 3, 8, 21) or 'Go back' (verses 15, 20), such as frequently occur in other biblical texts.

<sup>26</sup> This repetition has led many scholars to assume that the first section in which it appears (verses 9b-10) is secondary; see Montgomery, *The Books of Kings*, p. 313, citing Wellhausen, Stade, and others.

<sup>27</sup> Elijah's prostration 'over the child' (17.21) and his explicit entreaty for the 'return' of his life (17.21) only occur in the second reference, as does the calling out 'with a loud voice' by the prophets of Baal (18.28) and their gashing

themselves ‘with knives and spears...until the blood streamed over them’ (18.28).

<sup>28</sup>Elijah’s dual prayer at the second theophany (W. 10, 14) should be regarded in the same light, the greater force of the second occurrence being reflected in the fact that, while in the first (v. 10) Elijah is asleep and speaks with ‘the word of the LORD’ (V. 9), in the second he is awake and converses with the ‘voice of the LORD’ (v. 13). The same phenomenon can also be discerned from Elijah’s response the second time: ‘he wrapped his mantle about his face’ (v. 13).

<sup>29</sup>This uncertainty derives from the words ‘Arise and eat, or the journey will be too much for you’ (v. 7 -which suggest that the angel of God prompts Elijah to eat in preparation for the lengthy journey on which he is about to embark in the continuation of his flight. Alternatively, they may constitute two separate commands: one to eat, the other to get ready for a long journey ‘to the mountain of God at Horeb’ (v. 8) an expedition not directly related to his original flight. For a discussion of the various possible readings, see J .R. Lumby, *The First Book of the Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 199, who argues that, according to the Vulgate, Elijah undertakes this trek in obedience to a divine command. This exegesis understands the journey to Horeb not as a continuation of Elijah’s random flight, initiated by the prophet himself, but as an independent excursion orchestrated by God.

<sup>30</sup> An expression of this can be found in the divergent approaches taken by U. Cassuto and E. Greenstein. The former (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967], p. 31) asserts that ‘and he came, as he wandered to and fro for this purpose, to Horeb the mountain of God’, while the latter (*Interpreting the Bible by Way of Its Ancient Cultural Milieu*, *Studies in Jewish Education* 9 [2004], pp. 61:73 [69] [Hebrew] argues that, ‘Moses appears to have deliberately set out for the mountain of God’.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase ‘with the strength from that meal’ (v. 8) is designed to represent the force of the divine response to Elijah’s plea in his initial prayer, as well as to suggest, perhaps, that his distress in his second entreaty relates to far more significant matters than the immediate physical needs which lay at the centre of his earlier anguish.

<sup>32</sup> The description of Horeb as “the mountain of God” indicates that it was known as a place in which God resided’ (Greenstein, *Interpreting the Bible*, p. 69). While this remark is made in relation to Moses, it is also relevant to the story of Elijah.

<sup>33</sup> Thus he [Elijah] was sent by God’s encouragement, and with his protection, through the land of Israel from which he had fled’ (Lumby, *The First Book of the Kings*, p. 202). The allusion to divine providence which does not appear explicitly in the text-recalls God’s promise to Jacob: ‘I am with you; I will protect you’ (Genesis 28.15), and to Moses: ‘I will be with you’ (Exod. 3.12). It is also commensurate with the divine escort and safeguarding which those departing on a journey receive. According to House, ‘Here at another mountain

[Horeb, the mountain of God] Elijah will decide for himself if the Lord is God' (P.R. House, 1, 2 Kings Washville: Broadman & Holman, 1995], p. 222). This lucid statement--which adds a further dimension to the parallelism between the three figures, both Moses and Jacob accepting the Lord as their God in the revelation--corresponds to similar acknowledgments appearing in numerous departure stories. See the discussion in Roi, 'The Wayfarer's Prayer in the Bible', especially p. 320-322 n. 21.

<sup>34</sup>The close association between the complaint 'they are out to take my life' (verse 10, 14) and the plea for protection and deliverance proceeding from it may be adduced from similar links occurring in various places in the Psalms: 'Those who seek my life lay traps... Do not abandon me, O Lord; my God, do not be far from me' (Psalm 38.12, 22); of Psalm 70.1-6.

<sup>35</sup>M. Greenberg, 'nban', in *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, VIII, pp. 896-922 (902) (Hebrew).

<sup>36</sup>The uncertainty over whether Elijah's concern is for his life or his prophetic ministry may be related to God's question 'Why are you here, Elijah?' (verses 9, 13). This query may be interpreted as criticism regarding the fact Elijah is located here rather than among the Israelites, as indicated by Malbim (ad loc.): 'Should the prophet not be amongst the people in order to rebuke and prophesy rather than isolating himself out in the wilderness and mountains?' On this reading, Elijah is preoccupied solely with survival, possibly even demonstrating signs of cowardice. In contrast, it may be understood as a real question containing no trace of criticism. On this interpretation, it expresses Elijah's elevated consideration for his fellow Israelites and the success of his prophetic office. Many scholars have examined this issue, including K. Seybold, 'Elia am Gottesberg', *EvangelischeTheologie* 33 (1973), pp. 3-18 (8); EV. Nordheim. 'Ein Prophet ktindigt sein Amt auf (Elia am Horeb)', *Biblica* 59 (1978), pp. 153-73 (161). Radak (ad lac.) and Cogan read the question as rhetorical and intended to open the dialogue with Elijah; see M. Cogan, *1 Kings* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 141.

<sup>37</sup>This vagueness appears to be deliberate and intended to alert the reader-as early as the verse which opens the cluster of stories-to the ambivalence accompanying Elijah's prophetic ministry. This inconclusiveness is present in the oath regarding the rain. In both prayer and vow, Elijah initially declares his absolute commitment to God and his prophetic task: 'As the LORD lives, the God of Israel whom I serve' (17.1); 'I am moved by zeal for the LORD, the God of Hosts' (19.10, 14)-and concludes With a self-centred statement: 'except at my bidding' (17.1) and 'they are out to take my life'(19:10, 14). This ambiguity runs as a central theme through this section, being evident at the Brook of Cherith, Zarephath, and in the wilderness. The sense of dependence which Elijah's circumstances are intended to plant within him is designed to aid him in understanding his human limitations. Such an inner struggle between self-denial, which calls for the acceptance of his prophetic ministry, and his lack

of will-or ability-to act in accordance with the demands of this once are also characteristic of Jonah's life, creating a substantive and linguistic analogy between the two figures.

<sup>38</sup>House (1, 2 Kings, p. 223) suggests in relation to Elijah's second prayer: 'Again, he sees no real reason to continue'. This implies that Elijah's imploration which includes the clause 'and they are out to take my life' carries the same sense as the former petition, at whose centre lies the plea, 'Take my life'. Cogan (1 Kings, pp. 452-453) also adduces an analogy between the two prayers, on the basis of which together with the recognition that while the first deals with Jezebel's crimes, the second addresses those of the people-he concludes that each originated in an independent narrative.

<sup>39</sup>This is the fashion in which the midrashic author appears to have understood the text: "...the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant". Said God to him [Elijah]: "Is it my covenant or thy covenant?" He then said, "They have thrown down Thine altars." Said God to him: "Are they my altars or thine altars?" He then said. "And slain Thy Prophets with the sword." Said God to him: "They are my Prophets; what concern is it of thine?" (Cant. Rab. I. 6, 1).

<sup>40</sup>W. Brueggemann (1 & 2 Kings (Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2000). pp. 236-37) points out that God expresses no sympathy for Elijah's suffering and plight. Such as occurs in parallel stories commanding him to return to his perilous predicament, suggesting that this exceptional response serves as further support for the claim that the author seeks to portray Elijah in a negative light as possibly also indicated by God's statement: 'I will leave in Israel seven thousand (verse 18). On this basis, it may be understood that 'God intimated to him that he was not the sole servant of God ("I alone am left") but there were seven thousand others" in Israel also classified as loyal servants of God' (Y. Kiel, The Book of Kings [Jerusalem: Mossad Halav Kook 1989 (Hebrew)], p. 387).

<sup>41</sup>This feature may also reflect the prevalent notion that God's presence is "mud to a particular place—a house, city or country; see. e.g., Wellhausen, Die Compolillon dc: Heralwchs, p. 9; B. Slade, Bibli'scheTheologie des Allen Testaments. I. Die Religion Israel: and die Enslslnmg dc: Judenmnis (Tilbmgen: J.C.B. Mohr. 1905). p. 10); H Gunkel. Genesis (translated M.E. Biddle; Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) p. 46.

<sup>42</sup>Despite his office and calling the prophetic figure also seeks to return to III: on home: 'Samuel judged Israel as long as he lived. Each year he made the rounds...and acted as judge over Israel at all those places. Then he would return to Ramah for his home was there...' (1 Samuel 7:15-17).

<sup>43</sup>%r,Dñ;:Dt 17, 16 & (less often) f.:Ex 18, 20 way, road, distance, journey, manner — absolute.ÂdGenesis 38:16 ;%r,D+' verse 21; construct. %r,D, 3:24; sf.yKir>D; 24:42 + 4 t. + 2 Samuel 22:33wKir>D;;^K.r>D;Hosea 10:131 Kings 19:15;^K+,r>D;Psalm 5:9 + 9 t.;xker>D;Jeremiah 2:23 + 8 t.;AKr>D;Genesis 6:12 +;HK'r>D;1 Samuel 1:18Jb 28:23;WnKer>D;Judges 18:5 + 2 t.;~k,K.r>D;Genesis 19:2 + 3 t., ~K'r'D;1 Kings 2:4 +; du.~ylk;r'D>Proverbs 28:6; 28:18;

plural~ykir'D>Deuteronomy 28:7 + 6 t.; constructyker>D;Proverbs 3:17 + 24 t.; sf. yk;r'D>Job 13:15 + 17 t.,yk+'r'D>Psalm 95:10 + 4 t.;^yk,r'D>Deuteronomy 28:29 + 16 t.; ^k,r'D>Exodus 33:13 + 2 t.;xylk;r'D>Jeremiah 3:18 + 4 t.;xylk+'r'D>Ezra 7:3 + 3 t.;wyk'r'D>Deuteronomy 10:12 +;h'yk,r'D>Proverbs 3:17 + 3 t.;Wnyker'D>Lamentation 3:40Zecariah 1:6;~k,yker>D;Leviticus 26:22 + 17 t.;~h,yker>D;Jeremiah 16:17 + 5 t.;!h,yker>D;Ezra 16:47;

<sup>44</sup>This human need exists even within the prophet figure: 'When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons judges over Israel' (1 Samuel 8.1).

<sup>45</sup>41. Cf. Ishmael, for example, of whom it is said: 'God was with the boy' (Genesis 21:20). God declares to Isaac on his way to Gerar: 'Reside in this land and I will be with you' (Genesis 26:3). He likewise assures Jacob when he sets forth from the land of his fathers: 'Remember, I am with you: I will protect you...' (Genesis 28:15) and on his return: 'Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you' (Genesis 31:3). For God's command 'Go back by the way you came' (verse 15), see Radak (*ad loc.*): "They promised that they would not kill him". No such promise being mentioned in the text itself, its inference by the commentator points to the degree to which its absence is conspicuous.

<sup>46</sup>Ralbag *ad. loc.* This partial response recalls the similarly restrictive reply Lot receives. Not only is he not given to return home, as do the majority of the biblical wayfarers, but he is also not restored to any normal course of life. The sense of accompaniment and protection he experiences on leaving Sodom likewise ceases once he reaches Zoar. The seed to which he unwittingly gives life is the product of a dubious alliance, while his settlement is not in a permanent but a temporary abode: 'Lot... settled in the hill country... and he and his two daughters lived in a cave (rh'ªB' bv,YEåw:...hr"ê['M.B; bv,YEåw:)" (Genesis 19:30) just as Elijah, who 'walked...as far as the mountain of God (~yhiPl{a/h' rh:ï) at Horeb. There he went into a cave (hr"p['M.h;-la.), and there he spent the night' (verses 8-9). In both cases, the cave serves to signify non-residence at home, with all the implications of this transitory status. For the symbolic significance of home versus a transient dwelling, as reflected in the perspective of the nomad in the story of Idrimi king of Alalakh, see E.L. Greenstein, 'The Relation of Biblical Narrative to the Early Canaanite Story', in Zvia Ben-Yosef Ginor (ed.), *Essays on Hebrew Literature in Honour of Avraham Haltz* (New York: Jewish Theological Society, 2003), pp. 9-29 (17) (Hebrew).