



First Kings - Chapter Nineteen

V 1 Kings 17:1-22:40 - Elijah and Ahab (continues)

Summary of Chapter Nineteen

Elijah has won a mighty battle on the mountain, but a still more formidable opponent than Ahab awaits him in the form of Queen Jezebel. Victory now becomes defeat as Elijah retreats, both physically and mentally, and ultimately arrives not at Mount Carmel but at another mountain to confront not Baal but the Lord himself, whom Elijah serves but whose ways he only partly understands and accepts. The chapter concludes by introducing how Elisha became Elijah's disciple.

V.c 1 Kings 19:1-21 - Elijah and the Lord

Refer to the chapter summary above.

V.c.i 1 Kings 19:1-10 - Elijah Flees from Jezebel

When Jezebel is told of what Elijah had done to her priests of Baal she sent word to him stating that she intended to kill him and so Elijah fled to the south of Judah where he left his servant. He then continued on for a day into the wilderness asking the Lord that he might die there. However, an angel came to him, fed him and then let him sleep. The angel then came a second time and instructed Elijah to continue south to Mount Horeb, a journey of forty days where the Lord came to him to question why he was there.

¹ Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.'

³ Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

1 Kings 19:1-3

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done. The report came as a great shock to this champion of Baal and Astarte worship in Israel. She thought so much of these priests that she supported them from the royal treasury and now they were dead at the hand of Elijah.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah. Jezebel has a consistent track record of disposing of the Lord's prophets as can be seen from 1 Kings 18:4 and 18:13, and is to be taken seriously when she threatens to take Elijah's life too.

So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow. Jezebel heard about all that Elijah had done, encompassing the great confrontation at Mount Carmel. Yet her response was not to say, "The silence of Baal and the fire from Yahweh proves that I am wrong and Yahweh is God." Instead, she responded with a vow to kill within 24 hours the man who exposed the lie of Baal worship and displayed the glory of Yahweh. Elijah probably thought that the miracle at Carmel would have been the means of effecting the conversion of the whole court and of the country. However, finding himself mistaken, he is greatly discouraged.

So may the gods do to me, and more also and similar are statements made as an oath showing that the person expects divine punishment if they fail in their oath. It is first seen in Scripture being made by another pagan woman but in her case she made it before the Lord: <<*Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!*>> (Ruth 1:17).

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba. Elijah has shown himself to be a man of faith and courage who trusts God for miracles and, above all, moves to locations only in response to God's commands. But the 'word of the Lord' is absent in v.3 and does not reappear until v.9, when it takes the form of a question, clarifying that Elijah's journey on this occasion was not divinely initiated. The shock of Jezebel's resistance after Mount Carmel has led Elijah to forget to think theologically, so he flees from Jezreel in the north to Beer-sheba in the far south of the Promised Land – as far away from Jezebel as he can get. The distance from the top of Mount Carmel to Beer-sheba was about 120 miles or 193 km, which would have taken an ordinary single traveller around six days, although Elijah was in a great hurry and may have arrived sooner.

Had Elijah trusted in the will of God it is likely that he would have escaped death anyway without running away, as seen in the case of Jeremiah: <<*And*

the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest the secretary Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah. But the Lord hid them>> (Jeremiah 36:26).

It seems probable that Elijah had played into Jezebel's hand. Had she really wanted Elijah dead, she surely would have seized him without warning and slain him. What she desired was that Elijah and his God be discredited before the new converts what had aided Elijah by executing the prophets of Baal. Charles Spurgeon commented, 'Elijah failed in the very point at which he was strongest, and that is where most men fail. In Scripture, it is the wisest man who proves himself to be the greatest fool; just as the meekest man, Moses, spoke hasty and bitter words. Abraham failed in his faith, and Job in his patience; so, he who was the most courageous of all men, fled from an angry woman.'

He left his servant there. Believing that his life was coming to an end, Elijah released his servant from his duties but he only did so once he believed he was far enough away from any harm that Jezebel could inflict upon him in the absence of his master.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.'⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.'⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again.

1 Kings 19:4-6

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. Beyond the distant city of Beer-sheba, Elijah secluded himself even more.

Elijah came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. The broom tree is a bush with many branches and twigs, small leaves, and clusters of flowers.

An angel touched him. Elijah has been responding so far only to Jezebel's messenger, Hebrew *mal'ak* (v.2). Now it is God's turn to take the initiative with an angel or messenger of his own, also Hebrew *mal'ak*. It is God's first move in leading Elijah back onto the path of faith from which he has strayed.

He asked that he might die. This mighty man of prayer - mighty enough to make the rain and the dew stop for three and a half years, and then mighty enough to make it start again at his prayer - now he prayed that he might die. Thankfully, this was a prayer not answered for Elijah. In fact, Elijah was one of the few men in

the Bible to never die! It can be imagined that as he was caught up into heaven, he smiled and thought of this prayer - and the blessed 'no' that answered his prayer. To receive a 'no' answer from God can sometimes be better than receiving a 'yes' answer from him.

Later, Jonah would be another prophet to request to die but in his case it was not because he faced death from another quarter; it was because he was angry that God had been merciful to the Ninevites: <<*But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.'* And the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'>> (Jonah 4:1-4).

It is enough. It can be sensed that Elijah meant, "I can't do this anymore, Lord." The work was stressful, exhausting, and seemed to accomplish nothing. The great work on Mount Carmel did not result in a lasting national revival or return to the Lord. Perhaps Elijah had especially hoped that the events on Mount Carmel would bring Ahab, Jezebel and the leadership of Israel in general to repentance. If so, Elijah forgot that people reject God despite the evidence, not because of it.

Spurgeon comments, "Elijah said, It is enough, yet it was not enough even for his own enjoyment, for the Lord had more blessings in store for him . . . It was so with Elijah, for he was to have that wonderful revelation of God on Mount Horeb. He had more to enjoy, and the later life of Elijah appears to have been one of calm communion with his God; he seems never to have had another fainting fit, but to the end his sun shone brightly without a cloud. So it was not enough; how could he know that it was? It is God alone who knows when we have done enough, and enjoyed enough; but we do not know."

O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors. When Elijah examined the apparent failure of his work, he instinctively set the blame on his own unworthiness. It was because he was a sinner as the rest of his ancestors had been that the work seemed to fail: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23).

Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. This was the mercy of God extended to Elijah. Physically speaking, he needed rest and replenishment. God gave him rest under a broom tree, and provided miraculous food for the replenishment. God first ministered to Elijah's physical needs. This is not always his order, but physical needs are important. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a person can do is get enough rest and replenishment.

Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' Earlier, the Lord had sent the ravens to feed Elijah. Here, he sends one of his angels because not only did he want to sustain Elijah physically, he wanted to revive him spiritually so that he would regain his courage for the task ahead.

He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. His reaction to this was not recorded but it must have initially been a great surprise, much as the disciples would have had to find that Jesus had cooked them breakfast while they were out fishing: *<<Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead>>* (John 21:12-14).

He ate and drank, and lay down again. Elijah received this rest and replenishment repeatedly from the Lord. One short sleep and one quick meal was not enough. The Lord could have rebuked him for running away but he did not. Instead, he provided him with what he needed - physical replenishment.

Christians too should know the importance of supporting one of God's workers when they are in need of support in this way, just as the apostle John encouraged: *<<Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth>>* (3 John 5-8).

⁷ The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.'⁸ He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.^{9a} At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

1 Kings 19:7-9a

Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you. God sent Elijah on a 200 mile, forty day journey to Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai. This shows that God did not demand an immediate recovery from Elijah. He allowed the prophet time to recover from his spiritual depression. Elijah thought his journey was over; he has had 'enough,' Hebrew *rab* (v.4). But now he is to fortify himself for a further journey, which will otherwise be too much, also Hebrew *rab*. Food is God's response to Elijah both when he cries 'enough' and when he needs 'enough.'



Mount Horeb or Sinai

Elijah's **forty day** journey is not without significance. Indeed, a direct journey from Beer-sheba would require little more than a quarter of that time. Therefore the period is designedly symbolic. As the children of Israel had a notable spiritual failure and so were to wander forty years in the wilderness, so a defeated Elijah was to spend forty days in the desert.

Forty days and forty nights is also seen with Moses' stays on this same mountain (Exodus 24:18 and 34:28). Will Elijah, like Moses, see God (refer to Exodus 33:12-23) and if so, will it make any difference to his current attitude?

This is a significant period in biblical terms: the Noahic flood (Genesis 7:12), Jacob's embalming in Egypt (Genesis 50:3), Goliath's challenges to Israel before David killed him (1 Samuel 17:16), the period that Ezekiel had to lie on his side in symbolic punishment for Judah (Ezekiel 4:6), the time allotted for Nineveh to repent (Jonah 3:4), the period Jesus spent in the wilderness before being tested by the devil (Matthew 4:2), and the period Jesus remained on earth between his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3).

At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. There are some commentators who believe that this was the same cleft in the rock in which God placed Moses as he passed by him to reveal his glory (Exodus 33:22).

^{9b} Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ ¹⁰ He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.’

1 Kings 19:9b-10

Then the word of the Lord came to him. For the first time in this chapter Elijah is once again directly in communion with God.

What are you doing here, Elijah? God, of course, knew the answer to this question, but it was good for Elijah to speak to the Lord freely and to unburden his heart. Spurgeon comments, “God has ways of teaching all of us in our bones and in our flesh, but he specially knows how to do this with those upon whom he puts any honour in his service. You must not marvel, if God should be pleased to bless you to the conversion of souls, that he should also make you sometimes smart.”

I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. Elijah protested to God, “I have faithfully served you and now look at the danger I am in.” To Elijah and, indeed, to many servants of God since, it seemed unfair that a faithful servant of God should be made to suffer.

It was being zealous for the Lord that provided Aaron and his descendants the privilege of the priesthood: <<It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites>> (Numbers 25:13), and a quality of the apostle Paul: <<I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today>> (Acts 22:3), and: <<I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors>> (Galatians 1:14).

I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away. This was not accurate, but it reflected how Elijah felt. Even back at the confrontation at Mount Carmel Elijah said: <<I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord>> (1 Kings 18:22a). Discouraging times make God’s servants feel more isolated and alone than they are. Strangely, the reasons Elijah provided were actually important reasons for him to remain alive. If he really were the last prophet or believer alive, should he not seek to live as long as possible? If the enemies of God like Jezebel wanted him dead, should he not seek to defeat her wicked will? Elijah here powerfully showed the *unreasonable nature* of unbelief and fear.

Elijah seems to have partially forgotten his past: miraculous provision, the raising of a dead child, mighty acts of God on mountain tops. He mentions none

of these, but talks only of Israelite apostasy and prophetic casualties. The resistance of one person, Jezebel, has turned massive victory into overwhelming defeat in Elijah's mind. He is certainly not the only one left, but that is how he felt.

V.c.ii 1 Kings 19:11-18 - Elijah Meets God at Horeb

During this amazing encounter with God, Elijah is instructed by the Lord to return north to the region of Damascus, where he would anoint new kings for the northern kingdom and train Elisha as his successor. He is also informed of the fate of the kings in the north, how they would die and who would remain.

¹¹ He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

1 Kings 19:11-12

Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord. God knew what the depressed and discouraged Elijah needed. He needed a personal encounter with God. There was nothing fundamentally wrong with Elijah's theology, but at the time there was something lacking in his experience.

Elijah would have the special privilege of being allowed to stand on a mountain with Moses and Jesus at the transfiguration: <<Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus>> (Mark 9:2-4).

The Lord is about to pass by. God brought his presence before Elijah, but first to show where he was not. The Lord was not in the wind, he was not in the earthquake, and he was not in the fire. Like so many others, it seems that Elijah only looked for God in dramatic manifestations of his presence. Certainly, God sometimes appears in such ways but he often appears in less dramatic surroundings, making his presence known gently in the spirit of his people.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "This same lesson has to be learned over and over by us all: let us repeat it, 'not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord'. It is to be lamented that the most of professors obstinately cling to the

fatal error of looking for displays of power of one kind or another. I hear that a certain church is seeking for a very clever man: she thinks that God is in the wind. That still small voice will be hushed and silent, while the boastings of your wisdom resound like a howling wind or a thunder unaccompanied by rain.”

Not in the wind; not in the earthquake; not in the fire. The emphasis on Mount Carmel had been on God’s spectacular ways, particularly his use of fire. The emphasis here is on God’s quiet ways. He is not to be found in the spectacular elements of the storm outside the cave but instead in sheer silence. The Hebrew is literally ‘a voice/sound, a low whisper’ (*qol demamah daqqah*), i.e. the same ‘voice’ (Hebrew *qol*) that speaks to Elijah in v.13. On this occasion but not always God reveals himself in quietness; at other times: <<*As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder*>> (Exodus 19:19), <<*See, the name of the Lord comes from far away, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire*>> (Isaiah 30:27), and: <<*The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades. The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it*>> (Nahum 1:3-5).

This final phenomenon was a marked contrast to the previous manifestations. God actually met Elijah in the quiet whisper of a voice instead of the earth-shaking phenomenon that had gone before. Elijah perhaps thought that the dramatic display of power at Mount Carmel would turn the nation around. Or perhaps he thought that the radical display of God’s judgement against the priests of Baal following the vindication at Mount Carmel would change the hearts of the nation. Neither of these worked. This example is important for Christian ministers today, especially preachers. It shows that displays of power and preaching God’s anger do not necessarily change hearts. Instead, the still small voice of God speaking to the human heart is actually more powerful than outward displays of power or displays of God’s judgement.

Other indications of God communicating in this way are: <<*A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh bristled. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: “Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker?”*>> (Job 4:15-17), and: <<*Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all*

the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me>> (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ ¹⁴ He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.’

1 Kings 19:13-14

What are you doing here, Elijah? The point of the demonstration on the mountain was presumably that Elijah would answer this question differently on the second occasion of its asking (v.9). His answer is, however, exactly the same as before - I have been very zealous for the Lord (v.10 and v.14); the entire point of the demonstration seems to have passed him by. There is in fact a suggestion in the text that he does not particularly wish to understand what God is saying through these events. He has always claimed to ‘stand before the Lord,’ Hebrew *amad lipne YHWH*: <<Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word’>> (1 Kings 17:1), and: <<Elijah said, ‘As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today’>> (1 Kings 18:15); but here on Mount Horeb, in spite of the command of v.11 <<Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord>>, also Hebrew *amad lipne YHWH*, he apparently stays in the cave until the storm is over and he hears the ‘whisper’ (v.12). When he does go out, it is with his mantle or cloak over his face, which makes it difficult for him to ‘see.’

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.’

1 Kings 19:15-18

Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. God gave Elijah something to do. He

needed a task to focus on so that he could avoid excessive introspection. He needed to stop looking at himself and his own admittedly difficult circumstances. He needed to get on with what God wanted him to do.

These words indicate the real point of the 'low whisper' (v.12). God gives Elijah new instructions: whereas he has run south in despair to the desert of Beer-sheba, he must now return to the very north of Syria-Palestine in obedience and anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. A new political and religious order is to succeed the old, and this order will bring about the final victory over Baal worship. Total victory will come as a result of an ordinary political process (a 'whisper'), as God removes certain kings and sets up others; it will not come only as a result of obviously spectacular demonstrations of divine power, e.g. wind, earthquake, and fire, as at Carmel; refer to 1 Kings 18:20-40. And it will arrive not as a result of Elijah's efforts but as a result of the efforts of others. Elijah's role is now to prepare the way for these others, who are only a few of many servants of God who have not bowed to Baal or kissed him. God has ways of working other than the spectacular, although he is always free to work in supernatural ways.

God also prophesied against the house of Hazael through the prophet Amos: <<*So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad*>> (Amos 1:4).

God had more work for Elijah to do. He would also demonstrate God's choice of Jehu to be the king to succeed the corrupt Ahab and his wife Jezebel. God gave something else to the discouraged and depressed prophet, beyond work to do. He also gave him a friend and a successor. Elijah needed a friend; the core of his complaint before God was that he was alone. God let him know that there was a man ready to learn from the great prophet, and to be his disciple and companion. Elijah also needed hope, and since Elisha would be raised up as a successor to Elijah's prophetic office, Elijah then knew that his work would continue even after his death, for he had no idea he would be taken into heaven alive.

Spurgeon also commented, "Because the success of Carmel melted like the morning mist, he thought that his career had been a failure all along, and that he had brought no one to reverence Jehovah; but he was reading with the eyes of unbelief, and his imagination was leading him rather than the facts of the case. Here are seven thousand people scattered up and down the country to whom God has blessed Elijah's testimony. If he had not blessed his big things as he had desired, yet his little things had prospered greatly. It was Elijah's daily conduct rather than his miracles which had impressed these seven thousand and led them to hold fast their integrity."

V.c.iii 1 Kings 19:19-21 - Elisha Becomes Elijah's Disciple

This is a brief introduction as to how Elijah first encountered Elisha.

¹⁹ So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was ploughing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him.

1 Kings 19:19

So he set out from there, and found Elisha. Elijah did what the still small voice of God told him to do. He happened to do it in reverse order than God described to him in the previous passage. Perhaps Elijah believed that he first needed a friend and apprentice. Is Elijah back on track as a result of his trip to Mount Horeb? The closing verses of Chapter 19 suggest not. There is no mention here or in the upcoming chapters of Elijah's ever meeting or trying to meet Hazael and Jehu (vv.15-16). One never reads of Hazael being anointed, while it falls to Elisha to arrange the anointing of Jehu in 2 Kings 9:1-13. Even Elijah's response to God's command about Elisha seems less than wholehearted. There is no mention of his 'anointing' of Elisha as his prophetic successor; he merely enlists him as his assistant (v.21). Yet the names of the two prophets indicate the way that God's plan is nevertheless unfolding. Elijah has all but had his day – the day when it was established that *<<the Lord indeed is God>>* (1 Kings 18:39b), which is what the name Elijah means. The new era of salvation belongs to Elisha, whose name means 'God saves.'

Who was ploughing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him. Elijah found Elisha and commissioned him to ministry when Elisha was at work.

Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. The mantle was the symbol of Elijah's prophetic authority. This was a dramatic symbol that said, 'I call upon you to join in my work as a prophet.' The mantle, or *pallium*, was the peculiar clothing of the prophet, as may be learned from: *<<On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, but each of them will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth'>>* (Zechariah 13:4-5); and this was probably made of skin dressed with the hair on. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets to be mentioned as dressing this way: *<<Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey>>* (Mark 1:6).

²⁰ He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, 'Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.' Then Elijah said to him, 'Go back again; for what have I done to you?' ²¹ He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the

equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

1 Kings 19:20-21

Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you. The expectation to follow a call of God is an immediate response, such as: <<*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him*>> (Luke 5:11). In fact, Jesus taught against such delays as Elisha demonstrated here: <<*But Jesus said to him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'*>> (Matthew 8:22).

The Hebrew verb meaning 'to kiss' occurs only here and in v.18 in the entire Books of Kings. What the kisses have in common is that they both say something about allegiance. The worshippers of Baal kiss him, symbolising that they have abandoned the Lord, Hebrew 'azab in 1 Kings 18:18, as well as v.10, and v.14 above. Elisha wants to kiss his parents, symbolising that he has abandoned home and livelihood for the Lord, Hebrew 'azab in v.20, where Elisha abandoned the oxen.

Go back again; for what have I done to you? Elijah's reply indicates that he himself had not called Elisha; it was God's call. Whether Elisha would follow that call would be his own decision.

He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them. Elijah's apparent lack of enthusiasm for God's plan stands in sharp contrast to Elisha's reaction. He immediately leaves his normal employment to follow his new mentor, pausing only briefly to cut his ties with his old life. He kisses his parents goodbye and destroys his old means of sustenance, the twelve oxen and the yokes used to control them.

He boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. For some reason Elisha believed it was better use to provide food for the people who also worked the land, possibly servants of his parents or other land workers, rather than to pass them on to continue working the land. This may seem wasteful but does emphasise the commitment Elisha is making to break with his past life to serve the Lord.

Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant. This again is reminiscent of the response of Jesus' disciples: <<*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus*>> (John 1:35-37).



Elijah and Elisha circa 875-797 BC

Elijah and his successor Elisha figure prominently in 1 and 2 Kings as they prophesied against the wickedness of Ahab and Joram, also known as Jehoram, of Israel. Elijah's opposition to pagan worship also put him at odds with Jezebel, Ahab's Phœnician wife, who supported hundreds of prophets of Baal and Asherah. Eventually, Elisha sent someone to anoint Jehu, one of Joram's commanders, to be the next king and to execute judgement on the entire family of Ahab.