

1 KINGS 19

19:1–3

Jezebel was certainly upset, but threatening Elijah through a messenger rather than just sending soldiers to kill him hints that perhaps she knew she would not have been able to kill Elijah in that way. After the events at Carmel she may have thought a threat was the only thing within her power. The fact that Elijah fled the country in response is a little odd. If Jezebel was aware of her inability to harm Elijah, Elijah would have been aware of it as well.

Pointing out that Beersheba belonged to Judah is the author's way of telling us Elijah left the Northern Kingdom of Israel to go to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Beersheba was the southernmost city in the Southern Kingdom. The Land of Israel is often described as "from Dan to Beersheba," Dan being the northernmost city. Beersheba is a desert city within the Negev Desert. The name means both "well of oath" and "well of seven," as the word *sheba* or *sheva* can mean both "oath" and "seven."

19:4

Some people speculate based on this passage and others that Elijah was a convert. Perhaps his ancestors were Baal worshipers who killed sons of the prophets. If we can allow some further speculation, perhaps Elijah recognized the hollow victory of killing priests of Baal while knowing that even though the people seemed to have believed in the true God afterward, ultimately they would also fall away.

19:5–6

This is another miraculous feeding of Elijah, in some ways reminiscent of the story of the widow in chapter 17.

19:7–8

Further south from Beersheba through the Negev Desert lies Sinai, or Horeb as it was called there. Elijah's journey of forty days and forty nights reflects the reverse journey of the children of Israel with Moses, which took forty years.

19:9–10

The previous chapter tells us the altar to the Lord on Carmel had been destroyed (1 Kings 18:30).

19:11–12

The order of events here seems out of sync. In verse 11 Elijah was told to go (presumably out of the cave) and stand on the mountain. Then in verse 13, Elijah put on his mantle and went out to the entrance of the cave, where he heard a voice. One possible explanation is that the Lord's messenger who started speaking in verse 11 after "and he said" did not finish at the first period in the verse but rather continued for the rest of verse 11 and all of verse 12 while Elijah was still in the cave. Then in verse 13, "and it was so, when Elijah heard it" was the end of the messenger's speech.

If this is correct, some of the words would need to be altered slightly to make more sense, perhaps like:

And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD will pass by, and a great and strong wind will rend the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD will not be in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD will not be in the earthquake:

And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD will not be in the fire: and after the fire will be a still small voice."

The "still small voice" phrase from this verse has become one of the primary ways to describe promptings of the Holy Ghost. The word "still" implies a lack of motion, but the Hebrew word is probably better translated as "quiet." "Small" is an alright translation, but "thin" or "crushed" are also good. And finally, the Hebrew word translated as "voice" is the same word for "sound." Thus it is a sound that is so quiet it needs another adjective to describe how very like silence it is. Whether it is a voice speaking words or just a very quiet sound is not clear in the original language. This description is especially poignant after the larger-than-life experience of the previous chapter, when the Lord was proving His existence by a fire igniting the altar and then with a wind bringing the needed rain, all while Elijah mocked the priests of Baal for the silence of their god.

19:13–14

Elijah repeated his statement from verse 10. As the first footnote in verse 14 says, “zealous” is a better translation than “jealous.”

19:15–16

If Elijah anointed Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, the Bible did not record it. He did give Elisha his mantle (verse 19) but didn’t specifically anoint Elisha, at least in the narrative. Elisha also did not anoint Jehu but did direct one of his followers to do so (see 2 Kings 9:1–2).

19:17–18

One attested practice in the ancient Near East was the worship of some gods by kissing their idols, often on the feet. Seven thousand is too round a number to be accurate. Since seven is a number that represents perfection, the implication is that those who do follow God are more perfect.

19:19

That Elisha owned twelve oxen indicates that he was wealthy. That he was plowing with them himself indicates that he was also an active worker and not just directing his servants.

19:20

Elijah’s response, “What have I done to thee?” could be interpreted a few different ways. The surface interpretation that Elijah was dismissing what just happened doesn’t seem to fit. A more fitting interpretation might be more loosely worded as “Go back and cherish these normal moments, for what I have just done is place a mantle upon you that will be a burden far heavier than your oxen carry.”

19:21

Elisha burned the oxen harness to cook the meat of the oxen, perhaps as a symbol that he was fully committed to his new role. It also implies a more ritualist meal, a sacrifice offered as Elisha’s life was changed. The King James Version typically translates two different Hebrew words as “minister”: The Hebrew word here is *sharath* and usually implies a servant role. The other Hebrew word is *kohan*, which implies a role of a priest and can be used as a noun and translated as simply “priest.” One implication is that like Elijah, Elisha was not a Levitical priest.

Credits

Author: Ryan Combs

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editor: Verlanne Johnson

ScripturePlus Design: Jasmin Gimenez Rapple