

CHAPTER 19

INTRODUCTION TO 1 KINGS 19

This chapter gives us a further account of Elijah, of his being obliged to flee for his life through the threats of Jezebel, (^{<1190>}1 Kings 19:1-4), of the care the Lord took of him, providing food for him, in the strength of which he went to Horeb, (^{<1195>}1 Kings 19:5-8), of the Lord's appearance to him there, and conversation with him, (^{<1199>}1 Kings 19:9-14), of some instructions he gave him to anoint a king over Syria, another over Israel, and a prophet in his room, (^{<1195>}1 Kings 19:15-18), and of his finding Elisha, and throwing his mantle over him, who left his secular employment, and followed him, and became his servant, (^{<1199>}1 Kings 19:19-21).

Ver. 1. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done*, etc.] What miracles he had wrought, how that not only fire came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifice, but even the stones and dust of the altar, and licked up great quantities of water in the trench around it; and that it was at his prayer that rain came down from heaven in such abundance, of which she was sensible; by all which he got the people on his side, so that it was not in his power to seize him and slay him; and this he said to clear himself, and make her easy:

and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword; the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal he had gathered to Carmel; the Targum calls them false prophets, but Ahab would scarcely use that epithet to Jezebel; as for the four hundred prophets of the grove, they were not present, and so not included. Jezebel knew they were safe, being with her, she not suffering them to go to Carmel.

Ver. 2. *Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah*, etc.] In Jezreel, or near it, to frighten him away; not caring to seize him, and dispatch him, for fear of the people, in whom he had now a great interest; or otherwise it is not easy to account for it that she should give him notice of it; unless she scorned to do it privately, as some think, and was determined to make a public example of him; but being not as yet prepared for it, sends him word what he must expect, imagining that as he had the courage to appear, he

would not flee; no doubt there was an hand of Providence in it, be it which it will, that he might have time to make his escape:

saying, so let the gods do to me, and more also; the gods she served, Baal and Ashtaroth, and by whom she swore:

if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time; as one of the prophets Elijah had slain; she swore by her gods, and wished the greatest evils might befall her, if she did not lodge him in the state of the dead where they were in the space of twenty four hours; though Abarbinel thinks it is not an oath, but that the words and meaning of them are, so the gods do; it is their usual way, and they will go on to do so for the future, because of the holiness of their name; and therefore do not boast of slaying the prophets, or make use of that as an argument of their falsehood, for they will do the same by thee by tomorrow this time.

Ver. 3. *And when he saw that,* etc.] That her design and resolution were to take away his life; the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Syriac versions read, “and he was afraid”; or frightened; he that had such courage as not to be afraid to meet Ahab, and contend with four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, and in the face of all Israel, who at first were not inclined to take his part, is now terrified at the threats of a single woman; which shows that the spirit and courage he had before were of the Lord, and not of himself; and that those who have the greatest zeal and courage for religion, for God, and his worship, his truths and ordinances, if left to themselves, become weak and timorous; and whether this is the true reading, or not, it was certainly his case by what follows:

he arose and went for his life; fled to save his life, at a time when he was much wanted to encourage and increase the reformation from idolatry, and to preserve the people from relapsing who were converted; and through the miracles that had been wrought by him, and for him, he had great reason to trust in the Lord: or “he went unto”, or “according to his own soul”^{f408}; according to his own mind and will, not taking counsel of God, or any direction from him; and so Abarbinel interprets it:

and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah; to the tribe of Judah; for though it was in the inheritance of Simeon, yet that was within the tribe of Judah, (^(GEBU)Joshua 19:1,2), or to the kingdom of Judah, over which Jehoshaphat reigned, and so might think himself safe, being out of the dominions of Ahab, and reach of Jezebel; but yet he did not think so, his

fears ran so high that he imagined she would send some after him to search for him, and slay him privately, or make interest with Jehoshaphat to deliver him up, there being friendship between him and Ahab; for though this place was eighty four miles from Jezreel, as Bunting^{f409} computes it, he left it:

and left his servant there; he took him not with him, either lest he should betray him, or rather out of compassion to him, that he might not share in the miseries of life that were like to come upon him.

Ver. 4. *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness*, etc.] Of Paran, which began near Beersheba, and was the wilderness of Arabia, in which the Israelites were near forty years; this day's journey carried him about twenty miles from Beersheba southward, as the above writer reckons:

and came and sat down under a juniper tree; Abarbinel supposes that Elijah chose to sit under this tree, to preserve him from venomous creatures, which naturalists say will not come near it; and Pliny^{f410} indeed observes, that it being burnt will drive away serpents, and that some persons anoint themselves with the oil of it, for fear of them; and yet Virgil^{f411} represents the shade of a juniper tree as noxious; hence some interpreters take this to be a piece of carelessness and indifference of the prophet's, where he sat:

and he requested for himself that he might die; for though he fled from Jezebel to preserve his life, not choosing to die by her hands, which would cause her prophets to exult and triumph, yet was now desirous of dying by the hand of the Lord, and in a place where his death would not be known:

[it is] enough, now, O Lord, take away my life; intimating that he had lived long enough, even as long as he desired; and he had done as much work for God as he thought he had to do; he supposed his service and usefulness were at an end, and therefore desired his dismissal:

for [I am not] better than my fathers that he should not die, or live longer than they; but this desire was not like that of the Apostle Paul's, but like that of Job and of Jonah; not so much to be with God and Christ, as to be rid of the troubles of life.

Ver. 5. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree*, etc.] Being weary and fatigued with his journey, the same under which he sat; for there was but one, as that is said to be in the preceding verse:

behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, arise, and eat; so far was the Lord from granting his request to take away his life, that he made provision to preserve it; so careful was he of him, as to give an angel charge to get food ready for him, and then awake him to eat of it.

Ver. 6. *And he looked, and, behold, [there was] a cake baked on the coals*, etc.] Just took off the coals, quite hot. Bochart^{f412} thinks it should be rendered, “baked on hot stones”; and such was the way of baking cakes in some of the eastern countries, (see Gill on “⁻⁰¹⁸⁶Genesis 18:6”), the stones hereabout might be heated by a supernatural power, and the cake baked on them by an angel; these sort of cakes are in Hebrew called “huggoth”, as some pronounce the word, and are said to be now common in Bulgaria, where they are called “hugaces”^{f413}:

and a cruse of water at his head; to drink of in eating the cake; which cruse or pot a learned man^{f414} thinks was Elijah’s, not brought by the angel, only water put into it by him; (see ⁻⁰²¹¹1 Samuel 26:11), and he did eat and drink; but not all that was set before him:

and laid him down again; to take some more sleep for his greater refreshment.

Ver. 7. *And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him*, etc.] In order to awake him out of sleep:

and said unto him, arise, and eat, because the journey is too great for thee; which he had to go to Horeb, without eating more than he had; and there were no provisions to be had in a common way and manner in his road thither.

Ver. 8. *And he arose, and did eat and drink*, etc.] Of what was left of the cake and cruse of water, before provided for him:

and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God; for so long he was going to that place, though it might have been gone in three or four days; but he went in byways, and wandered about in the wilderness, as the Israelites did, and that for the space of forty days, as they did near forty years; and all this while he had

no other sustenance than what he had taken under the juniper tree, from whence he set out, which must be supernatural; for it is said ^{f415}, a man cannot live without food beyond seven days, (see Gill on “~~<2248>~~Exodus 24:18”) the food either staying in his stomach all this while, or however the nutritive virtue of it, by which he was supported, and held out till he came to Horeb or Sinai; called the mount of the Lord, because here he had appeared to Moses in the bush, and from hence gave the law to the children of Israel. Abarbinel is of opinion that this term of forty days was consumed in his whole journey to Horeb, his stay there, and return to the land of Israel.

Ver. 9. *And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there,* etc.] This cave, some travellers say ^{f416}, is to be seen at this day, not far from a church dedicated to the prophet Elijah, and that the cave itself has the appearance of a chapel; but a more particular account of it is given in a journal ^{f417} lately published, which says, this cave exists to this very day, and is situated at the foot of Mount Sinai, and is now enclosed in a church built of red and white granite marble, the entrance into which is from the west; the dimensions of this cave are in length five feet, in depth four feet, and in height four and a half. The Jewish writers are of opinion that this was the cleft of the rock in which Moses was put, when the Lord passed before him; but, if so, there would have been no need of Elijah to have gone forth to and stand upon the mount when the Lord passed by, (~~<1191>~~1 Kings 19:11),

and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him; an articulate voice was heard by him:

and he said unto him, what dost thou here, Elijah? this is not a proper place for a prophet to be in, in a wilderness, in a mountain, in a cave in it: what work could he do for God? or what service to his people? in the land of Israel he might bear his testimony against idolatry, and so be a means of reclaiming backsliders, and of establishing those that were in the true religion; but of what usefulness could he be here? Abarbinel takes it to be a reproof of Elijah, for going into a place so holy as it was, and in which Moses, the chief of the prophets, had been, and that it did not become such a man as he was to be in such a place.

Ver. 10. *And he said, I have been jealous for the Lord God of hosts,* etc.] Through zeal for the glory of God he had slain four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and this had stirred up the malice and revenge of Jezebel

against him, who sought his life, and which had obliged him to flee, and come to this place for shelter; this is the first part of his answer, others follow:

for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant; the law, especially the two first commandments delivered in this very place; and therefore he could hope for no protection from them, but was forced to leave his country:

thrown down thy altars: which had been built in times past for the worship of God, to sacrifice thereon to him, but were now demolished, that those that would not bow the knee to Baal, and could not go to Jerusalem, might make no use of them:

and slain thy prophets with the sword; which was done by Jezebel, the Israelites conniving at it, and consenting to it, and not daring to oppose her; slain all she had knowledge of, or even were known by the prophet: hence it follows,

and I, [even] I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away: all this Elijah said, as it seems, not only to excuse himself for fleeing, and taking up his abode where he was, but to stir up the indignation of God against Israel for their idolatries and murders, and to put him upon inflicting his judgments on them for the same.

Ver. 11. *And he said, go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord*, etc.] Who would appear there as he had to Moses formerly, though not in the same manner:

and, behold, the Lord passed by; or was about to pass, for as yet he had not; his messengers first went before him:

and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; strong enough to do all this, and so it might:

but the Lord was not in the wind; as he sometimes is, (Na 1:3), he spake to Job out of a whirlwind, (⁴⁸⁰⁰Job 38:1),

and after the wind an earthquake; that shook the earth all around, and the mountain also, as it did when the law was given on it, (³⁹⁰⁸Psalms 68:8)

but the Lord was not in the earthquake; as he was when it trembled in the times of Moses, (⁴²⁰⁸Exodus 19:18).

Ver. 12. *And after the earthquake a fire, [but] the Lord was not in the fire,* etc.] As he was when he descended on this mount, and spake to Moses, (^{<2901>}Exodus 19:1-25), the Targum, and so Jarchi, interpret all these appearances of angels, and not amiss; the wind, of an host of angels of wind; the earthquake, of an host of angels of commotion; the fire, of an host of angels of fire; (see ^{<9404>}Psalm 104:4), these ministers of the Lord went before him, to prepare the way of his glorious Majesty; which emblems may represent the power of God, the terribleness of his majesty, and the fury of his wrath, which he could display, if he would, to the destruction of his enemies; and could as easily destroy the idolatrous kingdom of Israel, which Elijah seems to be solicitous of, as the wind rent the mountains, and broke the rocks, and the earthquake shook the earth, and the fire consumed all in its way; but he chose not to do it now, but to use lenity, and show mercy, signified by the next emblem:

and after the fire a still small voice: not rough, but gentle, more like whispering than roaring; something soft, easy, and musical; the Targum is, the voice of those that praise God in silence; and all this may be considered as showing the difference between the two dispensations of law and Gospel; the law is a voice of terrible words, and was given amidst a tempest of wind, thunder, and lightning, attended with an earthquake, (^{<3128>}Hebrews 12:18,19 ^{<0298>}Exodus 19:18), but the Gospel is a gentle voice of love, grace, and mercy, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and may also point at the order and manner of the Lord's dealings with the souls of men, who usually by the law breaks the rocky hearts of men in pieces, shakes their consciences, and fills their minds with a sense of fiery wrath and indignation they deserve, and then speaks comfortably to them, speaks peace and pardon through the ministration of the Gospel by his Spirit; blessed are the people that hear this still, small, gentle voice, the joyful sound, (^{<0915>}Psalm 89:15).

Ver. 13. *And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle,* etc.] Through reverence of the divine Majesty he perceived was there, and through shame and confusion under a sense of his impurity, imperfections, and unworthiness, as the seraphim in (^{<2100>}Isaiah 6:2,3), and as Moses, (^{<0316>}Exodus 3:6), and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave; he attempted to come forth out of the cave upon the divine order, (^{<1191>}1 Kings 19:11), but was stopped by the terrible appearances of the wind, earthquake, and fire, a little within it; but now he came quite out, and stood at the mouth of it, to hear what the Lord would say unto him:

and, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, what dost thou here, Elijah? the same question is here put as in (^{<1189>}1 Kings 19:9), though there by an angel, here by the Lord himself.

Ver. 14. *And he said*, etc.] Elijah, in answer to the question put, and he says the same as before:

I have been very jealous, etc.] which the question was designed to draw from him, in order to give him some instructions and directions; which would suggest to him, that though he should not deal severely with Israel, nor with Ahab and his house, yet he would hereafter by the kings he should anoint over Syria and Israel, and by the prophet he should anoint in his room, as instruments of his vengeance.

Ver. 15. *And the Lord said unto him, go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus*, etc.] He is bid to go back the way he came, through the wilderness of Arabia, which was part of his way to Damascus, near to which was another wilderness, which took its name from thence; though Fortunatus Schacchus^{f418} thinks no other is meant by this phrase than returning to his former course and custom of preach the law of God, and reclaiming men from the error of their ways:

and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; it is nowhere related that Elijah did go to Damascus, and anoint Hazael, though it may be he did; however he acquainted Elisha with it, and he declared it to Hazael, that he should be king of Syria, and which perhaps is all that is meant by anointing; that is, that he should be made king, and which was declared by both these prophets, (see ^{<1183>}2 Kings 8:13).

Ver. 16. *And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel*, etc.] This was a son of Jehoshaphat, and a grandson of Nimshi; nor does he appear to have been anointed by Elijah, but by Elisha; and being done by his order and direction was the same as if it was done by himself, unless he was twice anointed, (see ^{<1190>}2 Kings 9:1-3)

and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room; which was in the half tribe of Manasseh, on this side Jordan; (see Gill on "^{<1172>}Judges 7:22").

Ver. 17. *And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay*, etc.] Which suggests that many should be slain in

Israel by them both, as were by Hazael, (^{<1208>}2 Kings 10:32,33) and by Jehu, (^{<1194>}2 Kings 9:24,33 10:1-7),

and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay; which may be understood either literally of the forty two children cursed by him, in consequence of which they were destroyed by bears, (^{<1194>}2 Kings 2:24) or rather figuratively by his prophecies, (see ^{<3015>}Hosea 6:5) who foretold the slaughters made by Hazael and Jehu, as well as others, (see ^{<1182>}2 Kings 8:12 9:7,8), these several things were not done in the order in which they are here put; for what Elisha did was before Hazael and Jehu, and Jehu before Hazael; these words therefore do not respect the exact order of time in which they should be done, only that each should do the part appointed and assigned unto him, and what could not be so well done by the other; thus Hazael was to destroy those that came out to war; and Jehu Ahab's family that did not; and Elisha the children of idolatrous parents at Bethel, that came not within the reach of either; though it may be observed, that Hazael began to distress Israel before Jehu appeared, (^{<1183>}2 Kings 8:28,29) and the prophecies of Elisha might not have their full accomplishment until after Hazael and Jehu had done what was appointed for them.

Ver. 18. *Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel*, etc.] From perishing by the sword of either of them:

all the knees which have not bowed to Baal; that is, had not worshipped him, which was signified by this gesture:

and every mouth which hath not kissed him; either the image of Baal itself, or the hand, in reverence of him; which rites, one or other, or both, were used by his worshippers; (see Gill on "^{<2812>}Hosea 13:2"). This either refers, as some think, to the present time, and so is an answer to Elijah, who thought he was the only worshipper left with which seems to agree (^{<5112>}Romans 11:2-4), or to the times to come, when destruction should be made by the above persons, and when God would have some faithful worshippers, and would take care of them; so some render the words, "I will reserve", etc. ^{f419}.

Ver. 19. *So he departed thence*, etc.] From Mount Horeb, and came to Abelmeholah, which Bunting computes ^{f420} at one hundred and fifty six miles:

and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth; which may be understood

either of twelve couple of oxen drawing one plough; which was a large number, but will not seem strange when it is observed, that Abelmeholah, where Elisha was ploughing, lay in the vale of Jordan, which was a clayey stiff ground, and required such a number of oxen to plough it up, especially at the first tilling of it, as this might be ^{f421}; compare (~~1Kings~~ 1 Kings 4:12 7:46) A late traveller ^{f422} observes, that at Damegraed, in upper Egypt on the Nile, six oxen yoked to plough had a great deal of difficulty to turn up the ground; or else, as the Jewish writers generally understand it, there were twelve ploughs, and a yoke of oxen to each, and a ploughman to attend everyone, and Elisha attended the twelfth; or was with one of the twelve, as the Targum, and might have the oversight of them all; Kimchi thinks, and so Abarbiuel after him, that this signified that he should be leader of the twelve tribes of Israel:

and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him; the skirts of it.

Ver. 20. *And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah,* etc.] His heart being touched by the Lord at the same time, and his mind enlightened to understand what was meant by that action:

and said, let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother; take his leave of them in this way, which was what was used by friends at parting, (see ~~Ruth~~ Ruth 1:9,14)

and then I will follow thee; which he understood was meant by his casting his mantle over him:

and he said unto him, go back again; to his plough:

for what have I done to thee? he had only cast the skirts of his mantle over him, and had said nothing to him; this he said to try him, and get out of him what was in his heart, and how it had been touched by the Spirit of God; and if so, then he suggests it was not what he had done, but what the Lord had impressed upon him, that would oblige him to return, and follow him, after he had taken his leave of his parents.

Ver. 21. *And he returned back from him,* etc.] To his father's house, and took his leave, and then came back into the field, perhaps with others accompanying him:

and took a yoke of oxen and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen: their yokes, and the plough, with an addition of other things sufficient to boil them:

and gave unto the people, and they did eat; the ploughmen and others that came together on this occasion; he made a feast for them, to express his joy at being called to such service he was:

then he arose and went after Elijah; left his worldly employment, the riches he was heir to, his parents, and his friends, and followed the prophet:

and ministered unto him; became his servant, whereby he attained to great knowledge and understanding of divine things, and was trained up to the prophetic office, which he was invested with upon the removal of Elijah; (see ^{<402>}Matthew 8:21,22 19:27).