

**Elijah and Covenant**  
***Implications for Remnant Theology in 1 Kings 19***

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 The Elijah Narrative – brief synopsis**
- 3 Critical Views on the Date and Implied Audience of Kings**
- 4 Critical Views on Covenant theology in Kings**
- 5 Covenant and conditionality**
- 6 Covenantal Significance of Mosaic Typology in 1 Kings 19**
- 7 Horeb as a crux in Israel’s history**
- 8 The Significance of the Divine Response**
- 9 Remnant Theology and an Exilic Audience**
- 10 Elijah in later Judaism**
- 11 Implications for Replacement Theology**
- 12 Conclusion**
- 13 Bibliography**

## 1 Introduction

One of the most important passages in the Hebrew Scriptures relating to God's covenant dealings with Israel is 1 Kings 19. While this passage deals with several themes, notably the Word of the Lord and the nature of divine revelation, the narrative functionality of the plot centres around Israel and the divine covenant. Until 1 Kings 19, Elijah's ministry was concerned with bringing repentance and restoration to Israel; from 1 Kings 19 that ministry of restoration is rescinded and the judgement of Israel is initiated, leading eventually to the Exile. In terms of Israel's covenant history, 1 Kings 19.15-18 should be seen as a hinge on which the history of Israel swings.

The purpose of this paper will be to show that 19.15-18 is a crucial passage for understanding the theology of covenant and promise in Israel's history, and in later Judaism. In the moment of judgement there is offered a Remnant Theology, which by maintaining an insistence that a remnant of Israel will always remain whatever else occurs, precludes the kind of total supercessionism prevalent in Replacement Theology.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 The Elijah Narrative – brief synopsis

Elijah is a strange character, like many prophets. He appears almost out of nowhere, simply emerging in 1 Kings 17.1 as 'Elijah the Tishbite', does various bizarre things, then disappears in the most dramatic exit in the OT (2 Kings 2). Due in part to the manner of his exit, he becomes a highly venerated prophetic icon in Inter-testamental

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<sup>1</sup> Certain ideas and material presented in this paper are adapted from my unpublished MA dissertation "*Why Horeb? The Wider Significance for Israel of Elijah's Encounter on the Mountain*" (2006)

Judaism. In the Christian arrangement of the OT canon, the order of the Jewish Scriptures is rearranged for various reasons, but one key effect is that the promise in Malachi that Elijah will return becomes the very last verse of the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> dramatically linking the promise and expectancy of the returning Elijah with the events of the New Covenant.

In 1 Kings 17 Elijah cryptically promises a divinely ordained drought, is fed in the wilderness by ravens, travels north to be fed by a gentile widow whose jar of flour and jug of oil miraculously supply both her and Elijah, and returns her son to life. In 1 Kings 18 he confronts King Ahab, arranges a showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, calls down fire from heaven, has the false prophets slaughtered, and brings an end to the drought. All of this is at the Lord's express command (18.36).

In 1 Kings 19 Elijah flees from the heathen Queen Jezebel. Despite the victory of Carmel, despite Yahweh manifesting his power with fire from heaven, and despite bringing an end to the three year drought which Elijah had predicted, the political situation remains unchanged, unbelieving Israel is by and large unmoved. Elijah's mission to bring repentance is making no progress.

So Elijah flees south, and with angelic assistance makes the journey to Horeb (Sinai), the very mountain where the divine covenant with Israel had been inaugurated centuries before. There are a number of deliberate parallels with the story of Moses in Exodus, such that this encounter is clearly intended as some kind of sequel. However if Elijah, or the reader, is hoping for a fresh reworking of covenant promises, both are mistaken. In answer to Elijah's repeated

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<sup>2</sup> Malachi 4.5 & 6 in Christian Bibles; Malachi 3.23 & 24 in Hebrew Bibles.

complaint against Israel, that they have broken the covenants, the Lord's answer is devastating.

Elijah's mission is rescinded and recast, instead of a ministry of repentance and reconciliation, he is recommissioned to a new ministry of initiating judgement. From this point the clock ticks down to the exile. It is not inevitable, God is to send a host of prophets to warn Israel of her ways, yet unless she takes heed, the process of judgement has begun. A process that in one sense ends only with the exile to Babylon, and yet in another is still ongoing when the Messiah agonises over Israel's failure to respond,<sup>3</sup> and presumably anticipates a further fulfilment of judgement in AD 70.

### **3 Critical Views on the Date and Implied Audience of Kings**

We must imagine the Elijah story being orally transmitted over centuries, but there is every likelihood that the present version was put into written form during the Babylonian Exile.

Paul House provides a useful summary of views on authorship, concluding with his preference for 'a single author who wrote about 550BC', who sought to account for 'Israel's tragic loss of the land as it was promised in the Pentateuch', who 'was influenced by Deuteronomy and the covenant concept', and who 'looked to God's earlier promises as proof that Israel was not finished'.<sup>4</sup>

Others agree that 'Kings took its final shape in the early years of the Babylonian exile' so that 'exilic Jews were the

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 23.37; Luke 13.34

<sup>4</sup> Paul House *1, 2 Kings* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 1995) 28-39

intended audience’;<sup>5</sup> ‘a single final author in the exilic period’;<sup>6</sup> and that ‘the readers can be identified with the exiles in Babylon’.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the interests of an exilic readership sit readily with many of the ideas explored in the text. Assuming an exilic dating, it appears Elijah was rapidly attaining ‘the stature and strength which continue in subsequent tradition’, becoming the ‘quintessential hero’ in the Mosaic prophetic tradition,<sup>8</sup> as demonstrated by the ‘respect and reverence in which Elijah was held in the circles that transmitted the stories of his life’s work’.<sup>9</sup> Elijah’s acquired status in later Jewish thinking is important in assessing his role in covenant history, and will be examined further.

#### **4 Critical Views on Covenant Theology in Kings**

A range of scholarly opinion has identified the main theme of Kings being the judgement of Israel within a covenant context, balanced by a message of future hope. Gordon McConville speaks for many with two seminal phrases that ‘Kings is arguably all about a loss of identity’,<sup>10</sup> and yet there will be ‘grace in the end’.<sup>11</sup> Likewise Iain Provan identifies a key theme of Kings being Yahweh as judge, though judgement will not extinguish his Promise.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Nelson *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation; Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1987) 4

<sup>6</sup> Gordon McConville ‘Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings’ *Biblica* 70 (1989) 46

<sup>7</sup> Terence Fretheim *First and Second Kings* WBC (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1999) 8

<sup>8</sup> John Olley ‘YHWH and His Zealous Prophet: The Presentation of Elijah in 1 & 2 Kings’ *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 80 (1998) 25

<sup>9</sup> Mordechai Cogan *1 Kings* Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 2001) 93

<sup>10</sup> McConville *Narrative and Meaning* 34

<sup>11</sup> Gordon McConville *Grace in the End* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 1993)

<sup>12</sup> Iain Provan *1 and 2 Kings* NIBC (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1995) 11-13

Paul House includes the following as key OT ideas which reach fulfilment in Kings: Israel continually transgresses the Mosaic covenant which brings the punishments of Deut 27-28, the Davidic line loses its kingdom and thus the Davidic promise is 'reinterpreted from a physical to a spiritual reality', since temple worship ends priests have no function, and the sole residual element of Israel's spiritual heritage becomes the prophetic movement.<sup>13</sup>

Terence Fretheim suggests that 'the book of Kings is relentless in speaking sharply about the basic reason for Israel's tragic history;' identifying that 'God's word of judgement', and 'God's word of promise' both shape Israel's history. He summarises that 'Israel's history is lived out within a tension of judgement and promise';<sup>14</sup> and considers an important aspect of Kings to be the tension between literality of promises given and the elasticity and ambiguity in their fulfilment, an interesting observation when analysing the cryptic nature of the judgement-command given to Elijah in 19.15-18, and the nature of its subsequent fulfilment.

Donald Wiseman considers Kings' main purpose to be not only a warning of judgement, but also a 'reminder of God's persevering love and grace', and significantly identifies God's promise to David being fulfilled through a remnant.<sup>15</sup>

## **5 Covenant and Conditionality**

The Deuteronomistic theology of Kings as a whole is deeply concerned with relating covenant conditionality to the failure

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<sup>13</sup> House *1, 2 Kings* 71

<sup>14</sup> Fretheim *First and Second Kings* 10-14

<sup>15</sup> Donald Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* Tyndale (Leicester, IVP, 1993) 16-21

of Israel.<sup>16</sup> In this context the emphatic repetition of Elijah's appeal to covenant cannot be ignored, and Yahweh's sweeping, dramatic, and drastic response supports his prophet's allegations by implementing the conditionality terms of the covenantal agreements.

Yet there is a good deal of disagreement as to how the interplay of covenant conditionality and the certainty of promise inter-react. The Deuteronomistic enterprise depends as a basic premise on the concept of covenant conditionality,<sup>17</sup> that there is an element of judgement implied in the covenantal conditions if covenant requirements are not adhered to.

Childs observes that from Wellhausen onwards it was considered that the term *covenant* was specifically used in Deuteronomic circles to emphasise dependence on conditions which might be dissolved through disobedience.<sup>18</sup> In terms of the Sinai covenant, Childs supports Zimmerli believing that there was a "dialectic of promise and threat existing from the very inception of the law" so that "the prophets were simply executors of the threat of destruction always implicit in Israel's obligation of covenant loyalty".<sup>19</sup> In either case the implication of conditionality in covenant theology is clear.

Walter Brueggemann comments that "it can be argued that the covenant Yahweh made with Abraham is one of divine

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<sup>16</sup> While it is commonly accepted that ideologically Kings supports the theological agendas of the 'Deuteronomistic' school, I have argued elsewhere that the 'Deuteronomistic' agenda was far more subtle than generally supposed; so that irony, deliberate ambiguity and whimsical Hebrew humour frequently combine to promote a subversion in which Deuteronomistic norms are constantly challenged, questioned, and tested. My unpublished MA thesis deals with this issue in more depth.

<sup>17</sup> House 1, 2 Kings 34

<sup>18</sup> Brevard Childs *Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993) 135

<sup>19</sup> Childs *Biblical Theology* 137

initiative that is unconditional, and the covenant made with Israel at Sinai is one of human obligation”.<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann cites Moshe Weinfeld as providing a compelling analysis in favour of “unconditional covenant in terms of ‘land grant’”,<sup>21</sup> and compares this with Levenson who “refuses any suggestion of tension or contrast and subsumes the royal (unconditional) covenant under the Mosaic (Torah-based) covenant”.<sup>22</sup>

While Brueggemann himself considers that “it is futile and misleading to sort out unconditional and conditional aspects of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel”, he nonetheless avers that the divine relationship will “have within it dimensions of conditionality and unconditionality that play in different ways in different circumstances”,<sup>23</sup> which affirms that both conditionality and unconditionality will play functional and constituent roles in Israel’s covenant history.

Regarding the Davidic covenant, Wiseman comments that many scholars see an inherent contradiction between promise and delivery. Wiseman suggests that although conditionality is present throughout the Deuteronomic history, as an integral part of a theology involving divine retribution, there is nonetheless an inherent promise not to destroy utterly, which is rooted in the patriarchal promise and is implicitly so cited in 2 Kings 13.23.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Fensham points out that even within the episode of the breaking of the Sinai covenant recounted in Exodus 32, the patriarchal (as promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press 1997) 418

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann *Theology* 418; Moshe Weinfeld ‘*The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*’ *JAOS* 90 (1970) 184-203

<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann *Theology* 418; Jon D Levenson *Sinai and Zion: An entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, Winston Press, 1985)

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann *Theology* 419; see also Childs *Biblical Theology* 420

<sup>24</sup> Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* 22



covenant was specifically evidenced as continuing in force (Ex 33.1).<sup>25</sup>

Even if, with Brueggemann and Childs, we are suspicious of the mechanisms by which conditionality and unconditionality act within covenant theology, the tensions within this inherent ambiguity are containable within the parameters of a remnant theology. So Wiseman summarises that 'later Jewish and Christian tradition sees that, despite the conditionality, God kept a remnant of his people alive'.<sup>26</sup> Thus the core promise for the people and the Land remains intact and is irrevocable.

If a significant aspect of the Horeb narrative is the proposition of a remnant theology in the face of deep disappointment in covenantal expectations, then the very possibility of remnant theology exists precisely because any conditionality inherent in the later covenants still leaves the irrevocable nature of the patriarchal promise intact.

## **6 Covenantal Significance of Mosaic Typology in 1 Kings 19**

Most scholars note the similarities with Moses' earlier encounter on the same mountain, a parallel which immediately suggests covenant significance, and many follow Childs in considering whether or not 'Elijah is presented as Moses *redivivus*'.<sup>27</sup>

Cohn acknowledges Horeb as 'the place of covenant making', and identifies the grammatical use of the article to

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<sup>25</sup> FC Fensham "Covenant, Alliance" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, IVP, 1996) 236

<sup>26</sup> Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* 22

<sup>27</sup> Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* 45; Brevard Childs "On Reading the Elijah Narratives" *Interpretation* 34 (1980) 135

identify *'the cave'* as 'probably indicating the place on the mountain where Moses stood'.<sup>28</sup> The view that *the cave* should be identified with the cleft in the rock in which Moses was hidden, is a view 'which is as old as the Talmud'.<sup>29</sup>

Dumbrell recognises that after Beersheba 'the Mosaic typology, so important for our understanding of this account, begins to take over', and agrees with Cohn that 'The use of the Hebrew article with *cave* cannot be explained as the generic use of the article. Rather the precise parallels with Moses' experience as covenant mediator on Sinai are being drawn for Elijah.' He notes 'remarkable parallels in Elijah's circumstances to that of Moses', but agrees that 'covenant renewal is not the issue which the theophany takes up'.<sup>30</sup>

Mordechai Cogan discerns a deliberate literary technique, noting that 'throughout, the narrator has creatively used motifs associated with Moses, enriching his tale with literary allusions that, at times, attain verbal resemblance to the earlier tradition'. The motifs he discerns include the forty days journey (Exod 24:18); Moses' abstinence from food and water (Exod 34:28); both stood in a cave or crevice (Exod 33:22); Elijah covers his face with his cloak while Moses is covered by the hand of Yahweh (Exod 33:23); while the earthquake, wind and fire is surely the most direct literary reference to the Sinai encounter (Exod 19:18). Cogan concludes that 'Elijah is depicted as having reached the pinnacle of his career, privileged with a personal revelation of Moses-like dimensions'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Cohn "The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101/3 (1982) 342

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Robinson "Elijah at Horeb: 1 Kings 19:1-18 – A Coherent Narrative" *Revue Biblique* No 98 (1991) 529 n 9

<sup>30</sup> William Dumbrell "What are you doing here? Elijah at Horeb" *Crux* 22/1 (1986) 14-18

<sup>31</sup> Cogan *1 Kings* 456-7

Given the strength of the Mosaic parallels, we must identify the covenant as the central issue of the chapter's focus. The Mosaic allusions are deliberately nuanced, the encounter on the holy mountain can only be intended as a sequel to the Mosaic encounter with covenantal implications. But here is no renewal of covenantal commitment by Yahweh or Israel, rather we find a deconstruction; not a new beginning, but a reversal; the beginning of the end, the explanation of the exile.

So: 'the covenant concluded at Sinai ... is forsaken, and the prophetic institution, founded by ... Moses is breaking down. Everything which was started by Moses seems to fall apart ... the theophany at Horeb announces that an important intervention by Yahweh is at hand ... a decision which is going to change the current of history.'<sup>32</sup>

## 7 Horeb as a crux in Israel's history

We have increasingly demonstrated that Elijah's encounter at Horeb should be seen as an important crux in the covenant history of Israel. Walter Brueggemann puts Elijah's encounter at Horeb in context as one of three major encounters, along with Abraham and Moses, which are 'pivotaly important for the life and self-preservation of Israel'.<sup>33</sup>

The transition from Elijah to Elisha can be summarised that, 'while Elijah represents a warning and compelling prophecy ... Elisha represents active engagement in politics in order to start the time of judgement and purification when the

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<sup>32</sup> Johan Lust "A gentle breeze or a roaring thunderous sound? Elijah at Horeb: 1 Kings 19:12" *Vetus Testamentum* 25/1 (1975) 113

<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann *Theology* 571

conversion has failed and the covenant is broken'; and so although Elijah 'worked hard for the life-saving conversion of Israel' he was ultimately unsuccessful, and 'Israel's lack of change forced the extermination of Israel initiated by Yahweh'.<sup>34</sup>

We should see that the Horeb encounter is centred on the moral failure of the nation and the deserved ensuing judgement. So Uriel Simon summarises:

'On Mount Horeb Elijah's zealousness for his God receives full backing, the culpability ... is laid squarely on the shoulders of the people, and his indictment of Israel provides ... justification for the drastic severity with which the Lord will henceforth judge His people'.<sup>35</sup>

## **8 The Significance of the Divine Response (19.15-18)**

This brings us to consider the nature of the Divine response to Elijah in 19.15-18. Elijah has complained that "the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword".<sup>36</sup> The Lord's response is a validation of Elijah's analysis of the tragic state of covenant rejection by the nation. Elijah is not told to return to his former ministry of bringing Israel to repentance; that is clearly over; neither is he removed from ministry; instead he is given the serious and weighty duty of

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<sup>34</sup> Susanne Otto "The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomic History" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27/4 (2003) 505-6

<sup>35</sup> Uriel Simon *Reading Prophetic Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana University, 1997)225

<sup>36</sup> 19.14 NRSV

instituting a process of judgement, a process which will take decades to work through.

The revised commission has to be seen as formulaic and typological, consciously stylistic in its presentation. While the details bear only the widest kind of reference to their later narrative fulfilment, this reflects the tension between literality of prophetic utterances and the elasticity and ambiguity in their fulfilment throughout Kings, as already noted by Fretheim.<sup>37</sup>

The revised commission symbolically affirms Yahweh's rule over Gentiles, kings and prophets; it offers judgement through Gentile agencies, disruption of dynastic expectations, and a prophetic 'sword' which tears down as well as binds up. And yet, importantly and symbolically, a holy remnant is offered, seemingly almost as an afterthought, but a concept of the utmost significance.

Following Yahweh's covenant-reversal formula for judgement, here is a covenant-affirming promise of survival. Since the number seven thousand is typological,<sup>38</sup> being a 'round number and a multiple of seven, the perfect number',<sup>39</sup> it is 'symbolic of a perfectly complete and not insignificant number'.<sup>40</sup> Identifying that seven thousand will be saved is a message of comfort that 'in the face of a terrible future there is hope of survival',<sup>41</sup> and a 'reminder of God's persevering love and grace'.<sup>42</sup>

Walter Brueggemann emphasises that the force of the Hebrew verb is better rendered as *I will provide* rather than *I*

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<sup>37</sup> Fretheim *First and Second Kings* 13

<sup>38</sup> Cogan *1 Kings* 454; Simon *Prophetic Narratives* 324 N140

<sup>39</sup> Gwilym Jones *1 and 2 Kings Vol II* NCBC (London, Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984) 335

<sup>40</sup> Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* 174

<sup>41</sup> Volkmar Fritz *1 & 2 Kings* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003) 199

<sup>42</sup> Wiseman *1 and 2 Kings* 16

*will leave*, so emphasising the assurance of promise, and indicates that Paul understands the significance of the passage in exactly this way in Romans 11.<sup>43</sup>

Paul is essentially arguing against the finality of a replacement-type theology, saying that “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.”(Romans 11.2 NRSV).

Paul then illustrates his point by quoting both Elijah’s protestation and the divine reply:

“Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ‘Lord they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, I alone am left and they seek my life.’ But what is the divine reply to him? ‘I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.” (11.3-5 NRSV)

Not only did Paul understand the promise of the ‘seven thousand’ as a symbolic promise of a holy remnant, but a promise which continued to apply after the inauguration of the New Covenant. Paul’s application seems twofold, relating in part to the holy remnant of Jewish believers who have found faith in Messiah, yet further in Romans 11 also keeping in mind those of the Jewish nation who may yet be ‘grafted in’ again (11.23).

The fundamental concept of a persistent remnant is therefore capable of other valid expressions, including the survival of Israel as a nation, against all the odds, into our own generation.

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<sup>43</sup> Brueggemann states “Paul understands the theological significance of the verb and so understands a theological remnant” Walter Brueggemann *1 & 2 Kings* (Georgia, Smith & Helwys, 2000) 241

## 9 Remnant Theology and an Exilic Audience

It is helpful in appreciating the significance of remnant theology to remind ourselves how the original hearers would have perceived this passage. We have already argued that while the Elijah saga was orally transmitted over centuries, there is excellent scholarly support for the proposal that the present version was put into written form during the Babylonian Exile.

Certainly the theological issues which would deeply affect an exilic readership populate the text. If the exiles are facing theological questions about the survival of Israel and Yahweh-ism, then any narrative composed for their readership should be interpreted as offering theological insights to those very questions which would disturb exilic readers. *Why has this happened? Is there hope?* If 'Kings is arguably *all about* a loss of identity',<sup>44</sup> then the exiles are deeply concerned to know whether Israel, the covenant people, will continue in any meaningful shape or form.

It is not difficult to imagine a Babylonian diaspora readily empathising with Elijah, himself sitting disconsolate in the desert. Like them he is outside the Land,<sup>45</sup> like them he wonders whether Yahweh still cares, like them he seems impotent before a pagan ruler, like them he needs comfort, succour, and assurance. If by the time of the exile, Elijah is already a legendary prophetic icon, then here he is an eminent symbol of exilic discomfort. Thus Elijah is an exilic symbol, one who by entering into their loss of hope, brings them hope.

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<sup>44</sup> McConville *Narrative and Meaning* 34

<sup>45</sup> Beersheba traditionally symbolises the southernmost point of promised territory.

If the exiles can identify with the Elijah of 1 Kings 19, because they feel that have sat with him in the desert, then they hope his story may tell them what the God of Israel might do for them, his exiled people. While the exiles learn theologically that at Horeb the hinge of history turned, and Yahweh's judgement began to unfold, they also learn emotionally that the future goes on.

An exilic audience would need little convincing of the severity of God's judgement. What they did need, besides understanding what caused the judgement, was a reason to hope. If the loss of the Northern Kingdom was when the ten tribes were lost, then this presents a terrible threat for the Babylonian exiles. Would they also perish? So in the very moment of passing judgement, the narrative places centre stage the doctrine of a remnant, so essential to exilic hopes for survival.

'And yet a remnant shall be saved'. Following Yahweh's covenant-reversal formula for judgement, here is a covenant-affirming promise of survival. Here is a message to give the exiles hope. Like Elijah they can never quite go back to where they were, and yet the promise of hope is there, of 'grace in the end'.<sup>46</sup> Covenant reversal is not the end, since with Yahweh there is always *hesed*, so always hope.

How the exilic audience, already having empathised with Elijah in the wilderness, Elijah at the end of his spiritual resources, how eagerly they must have identified with the symbolism of the 'seven thousand' reserved by Yahweh.

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<sup>46</sup> So Gordon McConville insists on 'grace in the end'; however harsh God's assessment of Israel, there will always be a way forward. McConville *Grace in the End*



Perhaps they too might be a holy remnant kept by Yahweh for himself.<sup>47</sup>

So 'there comes into being for the first time in the history of north or south, the doctrine of a faithful remnant within the more general community, and thus a new phase of theological activity.'<sup>48</sup>

## 10 Elijah in later Judaism

The words of Malachi predicting Elijah's return were to have a far-reaching impact on inter-testamental thought and New Testament *kerygma*. Symbolically Malachi 4:5-6 forms the final words of the Old Testament in English Bibles. Significantly Malachi links this promise with the aversion of covenant rejection ('so that when I come I do not strike the land with utter destruction'),<sup>49</sup> thus affirming Elijah's significance in covenant renewal-rejection terms.

The theme of covenant dominates the strident prophetic call in Malachi, with Elijah as the key figure. In stressing covenant conditionality yet ending with an offer of hope, Malachi reinforces the theme of 1 Kings 19:15-18. These verses in Malachi reflect the profound impact of Elijah on Jewish expectations. He becomes an 'equal-to-or-better-than-Moses' type icon.

The expectation of Elijah's return so dramatically expressed in Malachi was adopted by a number of other ancient texts,

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<sup>47</sup> This resonates with the hope expressed by Ezra "favour has been shown by the Lord our God, who has left us a remnant ... our God has not forsaken us ... but has extended to us his steadfast love (*hesed*)" Ezra 9:8-9 (NRSV)

<sup>48</sup> Dumbrell *Elijah at Horeb* 19

<sup>49</sup> Malachi 3:23 *Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation* (Oxford, OUP 2004)

including Sirach 48:10 and 4Q558 at Qumran,<sup>50</sup> indicating that this 'was not an isolated idea found only in Malachi, but one which gained broader acceptance', so that 'Elijah is named twenty-seven times in the gospels and many more allusions to Elijah have been suggested'.<sup>51</sup> Markus Ohler shows that the expectation of Elijah's coming derived from Malachi 4:5-6, did not essentially change between Malachi and the first century CE.<sup>52</sup>

The most iconic New Testament episode involving Elijah is when Elijah and Moses join Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.<sup>53</sup> According to Herbert Basser the Jewish understanding of this scene is derived from *midrashic* sources. Significantly 'in rabbinic literature Moses and Elijah often appear in the same passage and are frequently compared', but while both have special status, Elijah is generally accorded greater significance than Moses regarding Messianic expectations.<sup>54</sup>

So from Malachi, through Second Temple Judaism and into New Testament times, Elijah becomes a prominent prophetic icon, accorded greater significance even than Moses, with powerful implications in terms of covenant-judgement theology. While this iconic status mainly derives from Elijah's miraculous translation in 2 Kings 2, the nature of the references from Malachi onwards also implies a view of 1 Kings 19 in Judaism which sees the Horeb encounter being firmly related to covenantal history concerning future judgement.

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<sup>50</sup> Christine Joynes 'The Returned Elijah?' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58/4 (2005) 456

<sup>51</sup> Joynes *The Returned Elijah* 456

<sup>52</sup> Markus Ohler 'The Expectation of Elijah and the Presence of the Kingdom of God' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118/3 (1999) 454, also 461

<sup>53</sup> Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-38.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Basser 'The Jewish Roots of the Transfiguration' *Bible Review* 14 (June 1998) 30-35.

The significance for this paper is that Elijah is linked not only to the conditionality aspect of Israel's covenant history, but also to the core promise of ultimate deliverance. The ideas inherent in 19.15-18 are clearly embodied in later Jewish expectations.

## 11 Implications for Replacement Theology

I will leave others to consider how the proposition of Remnant theology may be applicable in a New Testament context, except to suggest the following.

One of the problems in combating Replacement Theology is that there is a good deal of truth in the supercessionist proposition. It is always difficult to refute a proposition which is partly true. Some like to distinguish between *replacement* of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, and their *fulfilment* in Messiah.<sup>55</sup> However it is phrased, it needs to be acknowledged that the currency of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in relation to Israel has changed. Neither can claim full validity without the Temple;<sup>56</sup> both look forward to Messiah and are redundant once he has come. One implication of Remnant theology is to allow a degree of supercessionism, while insisting at the same time that the core patriarchal promise continues to operate.

The purpose of this paper has been to suggest that not only should Elijah's divine encounter at Horeb be taken as a turning point in the covenantal history of the nation of Israel,

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<sup>55</sup> Matt 5.17 'I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.' (NRSV)

<sup>56</sup> Stan Telchin points out that since fulfilment of Messianic expectations in the Davidic succession depended on the genealogies recorded in the Temple, then either the Messianic concept was a myth, or Messiah came before the destruction of the Temple records in 70AD. Stan Telchin *Betrayed!* (Bromley, Marshalls / STL 1981) 56

but that the divine commission in 1 Kings 19.15-18 should be seen as a symbolic summary of the twin processes of judgement and salvation. Rather than endorse a New Testament principle of Replacement Theology, in which Israel is forever replaced by the Church, there is instead an emphatic proclamation of a Remnant Theology, which maintains an insistence that a remnant of Israel will always remain, whatever else occurs.

## **12 Conclusion**

1 Kings 19.15-18 is a crucial text in Deuteronomistic theology. In one brief enigmatic, typological, and quasi-poetic command it juxtaposes the impact of covenant conditionality beside covenant promise. The resulting proposition can conveniently be expressed as Remnant theology.

The impact for Israel following Second Temple Judaism is that to whatever extent Mosaic and Davidic covenantal expectations may justifiably be said to have found fulfilment in Messiah, yet there is also a core promise which is unconditional, and which insists there will always be a remnant.

While many soteriological and missiological expectations have found expression and fulfilment through spiritual Israel the Church, still YHWH the God of Israel maintains his core (Abrahamic) commitment to his ancient people and land; such that the inference concerning Israel for ensuing generations including our own is that we must affirm with Paul “So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace”.

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