AN EXPOSITION OF 1 KINGS 17-18

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**OUTLINE OF 1, 2 KINGS**

[*amended version* from Dr. Richard P. Belcher; RTS]

**A. The United Kingdom (1 Kgs 1:1-11:43)**

**1. The Rise of Solomon** (1 Kgs 1:1–2:46)

**2. Solomon's Reign** (1 Kgs 3:1–11:43)

* The *Wisdom* of Solomon
* The *Glory* of Solomon's Kingdom
* The *Decline* of Solomon

**B. The Divided Kingdom (1 Kgs 12:1 – 2 Kgs 13:25)**

**1. The Rise of Idolatry** (1 Kgs 12:1–16:34)

**2. Elijah's Opposition to Idolatry** (1 Kgs 17:1 – 2 Kgs 1:18); Elijah = ‘*YHWH is my God*’

**3. Elisha's Work as Prophet** (2 Kgs 2:1–13:25);Elisha = ‘*God has saved*’

**C. The Fall of Israel (2 Kgs 14:1–17:41)**

**D. The Fall of Judah (2 Kgs 18:1–20:21)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Elijah Cycle (EC) in 1, 2 Kings (Kgs) provides a vivid, if not ironic example of what has increasingly become a hermeneutical dilemma forcing readers to choose between polarizing interpretations of biblical texts. Brevard Childs and J.K. Mead frame the issue well:

“Few cycles of stories in the Old Testament have aroused more interest in recent decades from the great scholars in the field as have those concerning the prophet Elijah in the book of First Kings. Not only are these narratives highly attractive in their own right, but they open a vista upon a variety of important literary, historical, and theological problems.”[[1]](#footnote-1) [Brevard Childs]

“It seems fair to say that for much of the twentieth century, scholars generally emphasized Elijah’s role as the “quintessential hero” in “the long line of Yahweh’s intermediaries in Israel” that began with Moses...However, recent literary interpretations have painted the character of Elijah in a more ambiguous, if not negative, light. Through the use of close readings that highlight the psychological dimensions of his character and apparent inconsistencies in his behavior...”[[2]](#footnote-2) [J.K. Mead]

So, “…what happens when tension develops between the new knowledge and the old story?”[[3]](#footnote-3) Childs argues that the issue ultimately “turns on the use of proper discernment. How does one wisely use historical-critical tools in illuminating the canonical text?”[[4]](#footnote-4) In answer to this question, one purpose of this paper is to engage this broader hermeneutical debate by examining the presence, selection and arrangement of the various elements of narrative discourse in 1 Kgs 17-18 and the rhetorical devices employed by the author which contribute to the characterization of the prophet Elijah.

1 Kgs 17-18, among other things, depicts one of the most magnificent encounters and demonstrations of the sovereign power of God in all of Scripture: The Prophet Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. YHWH’s actions, like the mountain itself, tower over the surrounding text. Thus, readers should exercise caution in allowing the gravity of this particular event to unduly influence their assessment of the structural design, unity and voice of the larger narrative, and its effect on the interpretive process.

Consequently, a second purpose of this paper is to briefly explore the literary structure of 1 Kgs 17-18, arguing that the logical center of the text is 1 Kgs 18:21-4 where the themes of YHWH’s demand for ‘*exclusive covenant loyalty*’ (ECL) and the attendant themes of ‘*judgment*’ and ‘*mercy*,’ collectively (E-JM), surface and summit together, in the shadow of Mt. Carmel.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Historically speaking, *Kgs*, as a whole, covers events from the *ascension of Solomon*, through the *dissolution of both kingdoms*, a period of roughly four-hundred years.

In terms of the *Northern Kingdom* [NK] of Israel, **[**“the *Omride dynasty* occupies the physical center of the narrative of *Kgs* as a book. Such a center may seem odd at first, but one must recall that for much of the *divided kingdom* period, Israel, not Judah, was the stronger nation militarily, economically, and politically. Israel was able to invade Judah and threaten Jerusalem (2 Kgs 16:5–6; cf. Isa. 7:1), not the reverse. Further, Israel under Omri’s son Ahab was part of the coalition that fought the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III at Qarqar. And while the Assyrians won that battle, they had to return again in short order for another military action, meaning that their victory must have been less than complete. Accordingly, the time of the *Omride dynasty* represents the collision of the *strongest kings* with Elijah and Elisha, the *strongest prophetic voices* in the book.”**]** …

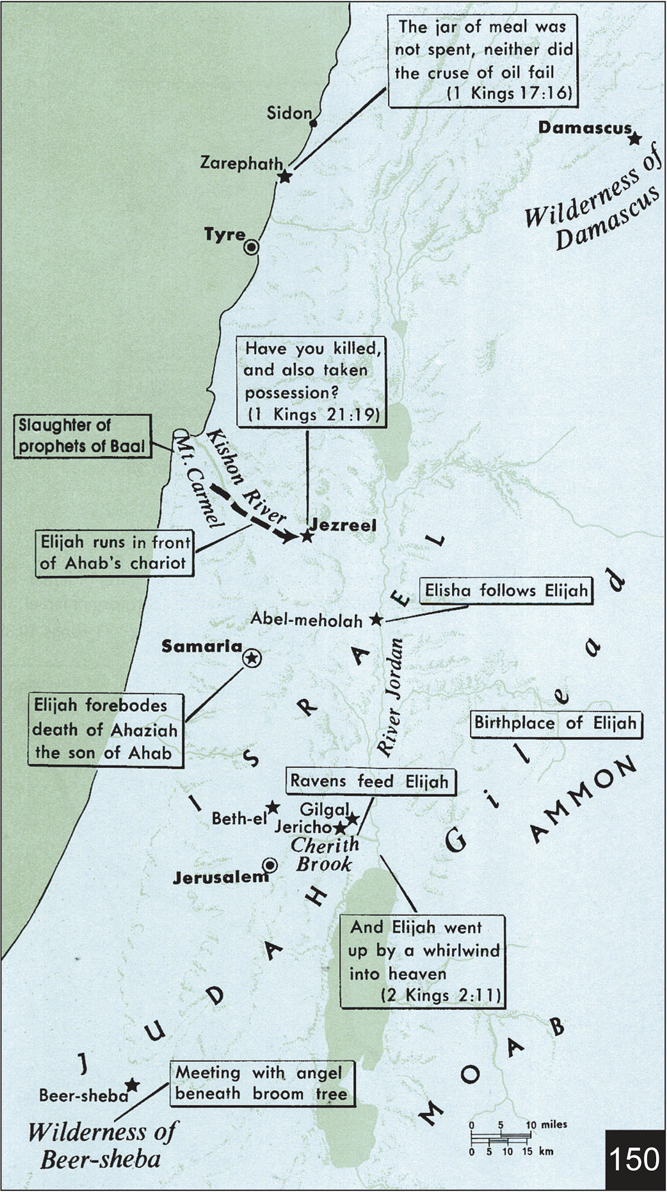
**[**In terms of the *Southern Kingdom* [SK] of Judah, “whereas the religious situation in the northern kingdom is completely negative, with the only bright spot being the return to “only” the sins of Jeroboam [the son of Nebat], the situation in the south is more mixed. Without question, the *Southern Kingdom* takes the same ultimate trajectory as Israel, a descent away from the worship of the Lord into idolatry, covenant curses, and eventual exile, this time at the hand of the resurgent Babylonian empire. Unlike the North, however, Judah’s history includes some good kings who interrupt and occasionally delay or temporarily reverse the downward trend**]** …

**[**During much of the time of the *divided kingdom*, the sins of the *Northern Kingdom* also seep into Judah. For example, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, marries into the Davidic royal family in Judah (2 Kgs 8:25–27) and devotes herself to establishing Baal worship in Judah, just as it had been established in Israel. Her attempt to destroy the royal family (11:1) almost extinguishes the line of David. Even in the case of kings who resist Israelite influence, such as Ahaz king of Judah, the moral situation is bad, as he allies with the Assyrians against Israel (16:7–9) and adopts their idolatrous worship (16:10–18). And even for the eight Southern kings whom the narrative praises, 2 Kgs 12:2–3 is emblematic: “*And Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places.*”**]**

[William B. Fullilove, “1-2 Kings,” in A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 238–240.]

Geographically, the events of 1 Kgs 17-18 occur in and around the NK with a focus on the vicinity of the *Jezreel valley* and *Mount Carmel*, a promontory in a modest mountain range extending into the Mediterranean which served as a natural boundary between Israel and Phoenicia.[[5]](#footnote-5) As a prominent ‘*high place*’ it was an ideal setting, rich in historical and theological symbolism; the perfect venue for the high drama of 1 Kgs 18.[[6]](#footnote-6)





Chronologically, 1 Kgs 17-18 occurs somewhere during the twenty-two-year reign of Ahab (868-854 BC),[[7]](#footnote-7) king of the NK. Under his leadership, the moral decline and spiritual decay of the NK had reached an epic low. Socio-culturally, the influence of *Canaanite religion* in Israel functioned at multiple levels against the *monotheistic prophetic religion*: at the popular level, in national cultic practices, and at the official state level.[[8]](#footnote-8) Prophetic Yahwism consistently opposed foreign *polytheistic*, *syncretistic*, and *monolatrous* religious expressions via the prophets. And although prophetic rhetoric contributed to the socio-religious tension, Ahab’s explicit actions exacerbated the situation. Ahab’s political alliance with Phoenicia and marriage to Jezebel, the “daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians,”[[9]](#footnote-9) the persecution of YHWH’s prophets (seen as ‘troublemakers’), Ahab’s worship of Baal and enshrinement of Baalist/Ashtoreth practices present a systemic “picture of oppression and state-sponsored apostasy.”[[10]](#footnote-10) “Ancient Israel finally had come to the fork in the road. Now, it was a clear either-or question: either Yahweh, the God of the covenant, or Baal, the god of fertility. [[11]](#footnote-11)”

**LITERARY CONTEXT**

Authorship of Kgs, although debated, is generally attributed to an *anonymous* author(s)/compiler(s) writing sometime between 562-538 BC in a *pre-exilic* Palestinian setting, who drew upon various available source documents to aggregate the text.[[12]](#footnote-12) Although the identity of the original audience hinges upon whether the text was written before/after the death of Jehoiachin, it represents a very narrow period of time.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In terms of style, Kgs displays *irenic*, *apologetic*, and *polemic* tones.[[14]](#footnote-14) The complexity of the discourse pushes the reader beyond the simple restraints of narrative dynamics, and forces readers to consider very basic hermeneutical presuppositions. Some of the most salient features of biblical narrative (*plot*, *characterization*, and *point-of-view*) and Literary-Critical (LC) presuppositions about them are germane. *First*, “characters and events are like two riders on a seesaw: movement at either end affects the other and it is the interaction of both that makes the plot work.”[[15]](#footnote-15) *Second*, biblical characters “who are treated at any length”[[16]](#footnote-16) are dynamic and evolutionary figures, demonstrating a “capacity for change,”[[17]](#footnote-17) and thus, can only truly be understood *‘*retrospectively.’[[18]](#footnote-18) *Third*, the narrator, while honest and omniscient, is also artfully reticent.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Failing to counterbalance a strictly LC hermeneutic with historical and theological perspective creates unavoidable ambiguity in the interpretive process. Focusing exclusively upon the inner personality of characters through the lens of rhetorical devices in the narrative can be warranted and helpful,[[20]](#footnote-20) but may also lead to misleading conclusions.

In very broad strokes, the basic purpose of Kgs was to encourage the covenant community to exercise *faith* and *repentance* while providing an *apologetic* for Yahweh’s judgment of exile, an explanation for the unrealized promises of *covenantal blessing*, and a future hope that Yahweh was both willing and able to restore the community to its idealized vision.[[21]](#footnote-21) In other words, as David Dorsey explains,

The Book of Kings … recounts the history of Israel from the time of Solomon to the Babylonian exile. Written *during* the exile, the book addresses the burning theological question of the day: Has God failed? Was Yahweh not powerful enough to protect his people and his temple from the mighty forces of Mesopotamia? The author’s answer is a thundering “No! God has not failed! It is Israel who has failed; and here is the record of its failure for which it is being punished.[[22]](#footnote-22)

As a whole, *Kgs* addresses the *history of kingship* in the land of Canaan under the central premise that the covenant community was a *theocracy*, founded constitutionally upon the Mosaic covenant and by design, under the supreme authority of Yahweh as revealed through His Word and Law, and as administered by and through His appointed agents and means.[[23]](#footnote-23) The *distribution of authority* among the various offices of leadership within the covenant community was directly established in Deut. 16:18-18:22 and addressed the roles and responsibilities of *judges*, *kings, priests,* and *prophets*, as well as guidelines for *worship* and prohibitions against *idolatry*. Although power and authority were distributed among the offices, the *Word of God* and *His Law* were sovereign, and *word of the prophet*, as God’s covenant mediator, was considered greater than the *word of the king*.

In terms of genre, *Kgs* is generally classified as *historical ‘prophetic’ narrative* written with didactic theological intent[[24]](#footnote-24) as a ‘*theodicy*,’[[25]](#footnote-25) utilizing the Deuteronomic account of the Mosaic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant as the standards by which the kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were evaluated in respect to *covenant fidelity*. The sub-genre of the *Elijah Cycle* (1 Kgs 17-19, 21, 2 Kgs 1-2:12)[[26]](#footnote-26) is *prophet story*.[[27]](#footnote-27)

In terms of theme and topic, *Kgs* addresses two paramount issues: the *crisis of Godly leadership* and the *rise of idolatry*. The development of these themes demonstrates that the *covenant curse* was a direct result of *covenant infidelity* precipitated by a lack of Godly leadership. Conversely, it argues that through repentance and obedience, the *covenant blessing* of restoration is still a possibility.

More acutely, the EC addresses two primary sub-themes: “on one level, it presents [a] *sacred biography*”[[28]](#footnote-28) of the prophet Elijah in a storyline covering the breadth of Elijah’s rise to prophetic office and ministry.[[29]](#footnote-29) On another level, it provides the narrative “context through which the battle of Yahweh against the forces of Baal is fought,”[[30]](#footnote-30) from its genesis, through its progression into the public political sphere and beyond, foreshadowing Yahweh’s final, future victory.[[31]](#footnote-31) Consequentially, it addresses the relationship between the offices of *king* and *prophet*, and through Elijah, the distinct *rise*, *roles* and *requirements* of prophetic ministry, including the concepts of *prophetic fulfillment* and *delayed retribution*.[[32]](#footnote-32) The unfolding of these various themes within the Elijah narratives provides insight into both his character and the concerns of the larger narrative. However, the primary focus of the Elijah narratives is not Elijah, but God Himself, as the people themselves proclaim in 1 Kgs 17:39 MT (יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים).

**CANONICAL CONTEXT**

Canonically, the book of Kgs picks up the larger narrative arcs of *Abraham’s call* in Genesis and terminates the Deuteronomistic period chronicling *Israel’s occupation of Canaan*.[[33]](#footnote-33) The narrower units of the Elijah Cycle (1 Kgs 17-19, 21, 2 Kgs 1, 2) are woven to at least three major biblical-theological trajectories.

*First* and most basic is *Deuteronomy*. YHWH is the sovereign King who delivered Israel from Egypt, the Suzerain Lord dictating the terms of His demand for *exclusive covenant loyalty* (ECL) to His vassals.

*Second*, the expectations concerning *kingship* in Dt 17:14-20 and 18:9-14, as Moses prepares Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land, and Joshua’s covenant with the people at Shechem (Josh. 24:14-28).[[34]](#footnote-34) The narrative tension builds as the people reject YHWH’s *kingship* (1 Sam. 8:1-9), and demand a king ‘*like the other nations*’ (1 Sam. 8:19-22; 10:1,17-19,24-5; 11:12-15).Finally, in Samuel’s *farewell address* (1 Sam. 12), the people are reminded again of YHWH’s just demands.

*Third* is the establishment of the *Davidic Covenant* (DC) and its various entailments. From the *fall* of Saul to the *anointing* of David as monarchical king (1 Sam. 16:1, 2 Sam. 5:1-5) to the *establishment* of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:1-3, 8-17), the hopes and expectations for both *king* and *people* are enhanced. Then, as *Solomon* ascends to the throne (1 Kgs 1:28-31), David reminds him of the requirements of kingship (1 Kgs 2:1-4), as Solomon reiterates in his prayer before the people (1 Kgs 8:22-61).[[35]](#footnote-35)

At this point, the narrative begins to focus more acutely upon the immediate context of 1 Kgs 17-18. As the Kingdom divides (1 Kgs 12:16-24) and *Jeroboam* becomes a (non-Davidic) king of Israel, the descent of both *king* and *people* in the NK toward apostasy accelerates. Jeroboam’s actions (1 Kgs 12:25-33) preface the stage for future bad actors to increasingly ratchet up the narrative tension.[[36]](#footnote-36) Eventually, the rise of the *Omride dynasty* under *Omri* (1 Kgs 16:21-8) will bring us to the very precipice of 1 Kgs 17-18. As Omri’s son *Ahab* ascends to the throne (1 Kgs 16:29-34), surpassing even his father’s iconic, rebellious reign, a series of abominable actions under his leadership and the influence of his Phoenician, Baalist wife *Jezebel*, precipitate Elijah’s proclamation of *drought* at 1 Kgs 17:1.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Peter Leithart provides a helpful perspective concerning this long narrative arc in the OT. He says, \***[**the ministries of Elijah and Elisha mark an epochal shift in the focus of Yahweh’s work with Israel his people. From the time of Moses through the period of Judges, Yahweh works with the *tribes of Israel*, with the *high priest* as the central figure. After Saul and especially after David, Yahweh works with *Israel* *as a whole* through the *king*. When the kings reject Yahweh and serve idols, Yahweh begins to work in Israel through *prophets* and through the *community within Israel led by prophets* [remnant]. Each of these transitions is initiated by a *prophet*: Moses the great prophet leads the tribes of Israel from Egypt and delivers their constitution, the Torah; a new Moses, Samuel, anoints the first two *kings* and organizes Israel as a monarchical constitution; and the prophetic era is initiated by the work of two *prophets*, Elijah and Elisha. Ultimately, Yahweh’s work through *prophets* comes to its fruition in the ministry of Jesus, who gathers a community within Israel, redefining the *true* Israel as those who follow him as disciples (Wright 1996a).**]**[[38]](#footnote-38)

**THE ELIJAH-ELISHA CYCLE** (1 KGS 17 – 2 KGS 13)

Dr. Fullilove provides a helpful introduction to the into the EE Cycle. He says, \***[**the Elijah and Elisha narratives… stand distinct from the surrounding accounts in that they largely interrupt the chronological pattern of the *divided kingdom* narratives. The *pace* of the story slows down, and the *characterization* changes, focusing less on the *kings* and more on the activities and emotions of these two *prophets*. Further, the emphasis on *miracles* goes up considerably. How is this to be explained, and what is the function of this section of Kgs?...

*First*, the Elijah and Elisha narratives are set against the backdrop of the dynasty of Omri in Israel, and the *prophets’* direct condemnation of *kings* becomes the rule in much of this section of the book. These narratives preserve the clash of the most powerful *kings* with God’s most powerful *prophets*, and these clashes are emblematic of the question of the entire book: *will the kings of Israel and Judah be faithful to the Lord according to his word given through the law and the prophets, or will they seek after their own ways to their destruction*? These narratives have a central place in the book because they highlight this *central challenge*. In that *challenge*, Kgs leaves no doubt who has power—*Yahweh, not Baal*. Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–46), Ahaziah’s attempts to take Elijah by force are defeated by fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:1–18), and Elisha traps the Arameans (2 Kings 6:8–23).

*Second*, the *miracles* recounted in the Elijah and Elisha stories are not as haphazard as they may seem upon a casual reading. Instead, these *miracles* form a *polemic* against Baal worship. The Omride dynasty was marked by Ahab and Jezebel’s effort to cement Baal worship as the religion of Israel (1 Kings 16:30–31). The Ugaritic literature, though substantially older than the time Kgs would have been written, gives a relatively comprehensive picture of Baal, who had just begun to rise to prominence in the Ugaritic pantheon. Though Baal worship had many local manifestations, the basic outlines from Ugarit likely still apply. Baal was the *storm god*, more specifically with *lightning* as his weapon and *rain* as his blessing. Therefore, it is no accident that *fire from heaven* is a key component of the *miracles* in Kgs (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:9–16; 2:11; 6:17). Nor is it likely an accident that *control of rain* and *provision of water* feature prominently in the *miracles* of Kgs (1 Kings 17:1; 18:41–46; 2 Kings 3:16–17). As the supposed *giver of* *rain*, Baal would have been considered the ultimate source of food, and not surprisingly, many of the *miracles* in Kgs relate to the *provision of food* (1 Kings 17:1–6, 8–16; 19:1–6; 2 Kings 4:1–7). Ugaritic literature even discusses Baal’s conquering of *Judge River*, his rival, while both Elijah and Elisha can strike the Jordan and command it to part (2 Kings 2:7–8, 14). The Ugaritic Baal myth includes Baal *rising from the dead* in an annual cycle, yet both Elijah and Elisha even *raise the dead* (1 Kgs 17:17–23; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20–21). In the Elijah and Elisha narratives, then, God and his *prophets* are victorious not just over wayward *kings* but even over the other *gods* those *kings* follow. Anything Baal is said to do is actually instead done by Yahweh’s prophets.**]** \*

[William B. Fullilove, “1-2 Kings,” in A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 242–244.]

In 2013, Michael Bellamy (Boston University) in his Ph.D. dissertation titled ‘*The Elijah-Elisha Cycle of Stories: A Ring Composition*,’ argues for the following arrangement of 1 Kgs 16:23 – 2 Kgs 13:25.



**THE ELIJAH CYCLE** (1 KGS 17-19, 21, 2 KGS 1-2); ESV Headings

Elijah Predicts a Drought (17:1-7)

The Widow of Zarephath (17:8-16) **17**

Elijah Raises the Widow’s Son (17:17-24) **17-18**

Elijah Confronts Ahab (18:1-19) **17-19**

**I** The Prophets of Baal Defeated (18:20-40) **18**

The LORD Sends Rain (18:41-47)

Elijah Flees Jezebel (19:1-8)

The LORD Speaks to Elijah (19:9-18) **19**

The Call of Elisha (19:19-21)

Ahab’s Wars with Syria (20:1-12)

Ahab Defeats Ben-Hadad (20:13-25)

Ahab Defeats Ben-Hadad Again (20:26-34)

A Prophet Condemns Ben-Hadad’s Release (20:35-43)

**II** Naboth’s Vineyard (21:1-16)

The LORD Condemns Ahab (21:17-24)

Ahab’s Repentance (21:25-29)

Ahab and the False Prophets (22:1-12)

Micaiah Prophesies Against Ahab (22:13-28)

Ahab Killed in Battle (22:29-40)

Jehoshaphat Reigns in Judah (22:41-50)

Ahaziah Reigns in Israel (22:51-53)

**III** Elijah Denounces Ahaziah (1:1-17)

Elijah Taken to Heaven (2:1-14)

Elisha Succeeds Elijah (2:15-25)

J. K. Mead helpfully explains the literary structure of the *Elijah Cycle* in its canonical order:

**A** Introduction: Elijah’s *sudden appearance* near the Jordan River [1 Kgs 17]

**B** To Zarephath: Miraculous *provision* for Canaanite widow; restoration of son [1 Kgs 17]

**C** Ahab looks for water, is *challenged* by Elijah; Obadiah a *faithful servant* [1 Kgs 18]

**D** The *contest* on Mount Carmel [1 Kgs 18]

**D′** The *revelation* on Mount Horeb [1 Kgs 19]

**C′** Ahab murders Naboth, is *challenged* by Elijah; Elisha a *faithful servant* [1 Kgs 21]

**B′** To Ekron? Miraculous *judgment* on soldiers; the death of an Israelite king’s son [2 Kgs 1]

**A′** Conclusion: Elijah’s *sudden departure* near the Jordan River [2 Kgs 2]

**1 KGS 17-19**

According to Mead, “the narratives making up the Elijah cycle occur in 1 Kings 17–19, 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 1–2; apart from these, Elijah is mentioned only in 2 Chronicles 21:12 and Malachi 4:5.” So, in terms of its *narrative form*, the EC is structured broadly into three movements with “a janus to the Elisha Cycle.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The *first* of these three movements is the narrower unit of 1 Kgs 17-19.[[40]](#footnote-40) And though debated, the emerging consensus is that within the EC, 1 Kgs 17-19 constitutes “*a literary unity*”[[41]](#footnote-41) of its own, being “divided into three major divisions, corresponding basically to the present chapter divisions,”[[42]](#footnote-42) Furthermore, 1 Kgs 17-19 appears to be purposefully arranged in a carefully organized series of narrative episodes blended together through the use of *key words*, *themes*, and *theological motifs* in parallel sequences that provide depth and meaning to the text.[[43]](#footnote-43)

[Mead, J. K. "Elijah." In Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books, eds. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005]

According to Robert Cohn, the material in chapters 17-19 center around the *great* *drought* *judgment* and falls into three “Acts”:

(1) *the drought as a challenge to Canaanized religion* (ch. 17);

(2) *the confrontation b/t Elijah and [the Baal cultus] and the ending of the drought* (ch. 18);

(3) *and Elijah in flight and self-examination following his victory* (ch. 19:1–18).

Furthermore, each “Act” has a roughly *parallel* structure:



[Robert L. Cohn, “*The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17–19”*]

**THE ‘DROUGHT’ NARRATIVE** (1 KGS 17-18)

In terms of literary design, 1 Kgs 17-18 demonstrates a unique *chiastic* arrangement [a|b|c|d|e||e'|d'|c'|b'|a'][[44]](#footnote-44) with *key word*, *geographical* and *conceptual features* highlighting the contest between Yahweh and Baal for the heart of the people. In both *theme* and *structure*, 1 Kgs 17-18 emphasizes the central focus of Kings: “*the establishment of the reign of the God of Israel*.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Each *scene* in this narrative contributes to and derives meaning from the *broader narrative context* and their very “placement within the narrative as a whole determines the perspective in which the author meant them to be viewed.”[[46]](#footnote-46) A close reading of 1 Kgs 17-18, focused upon the key concepts of textual unity (*character, setting, plot, topic/argument*), size (*scope*, *horizon*), completeness, and separation, argues that all 70 verses are arranged in a distinctive broad-scale *chiasm* [a|b|c|d|e||e'|d'|c'|b'|a'].



**STRUCTURAL SUMMARY** (1 KGS 17-18)















**ADDITIONAL TEXT SUB-STRUCTURES** (1 KGS 17:17-24)

Jerome T. Walsh, in his commentary of 1 Kings makes the following observation regarding additional sub-structural literary design in 1 Kgs 17:17-24:

A. Speech by the widow (17:18); “*man of God*”

B. Speech by Elijah (17:19a) “*give me your son*”

C. Elijah takes the boy from his mother (17:19b)

D. Elijah brings him up to his own room ()

E. Elijah puts him on the bed ()

F. Elijah raises the child (17:20–22)

α. Elijah cried out to Yahweh, (17:20); “*O Yahweh my God* …”

β. Narrative (17:21a)

αʹ. Elijah cried out to Yahweh, (17:21b); “*O Yahweh my God* …”

βʹ. Narrative (17:22)

Eʹ. Elijah picks the child up (17:23a)

Dʹ. Elijah brings him down from his own room ()

Cʹ. Elijah returns him to his mother (17:23a)

Bʹ. Speech by Elijah (17:23b; “*your son is alive*”)

Aʹ. Speech by the widow (17:24; “*man of God*”)

Jerome T. Walsh, 1 Kings, ed. David W. Cotter and Chris Franke, Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 230–231.

**READING THE TEXT** (1 KGS 17-18)

The reign of the Omride dynasty, and particularly the rise of Ahab to power in Israel, establishes the immediate narrative context and tension for our text: YHWH’s judgment of *drought*:

**1 Kings 16:29-34** – *Ahab Reigns in Israel* (ESV)

29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah,

Ahab the son of Omri

began to reign over Israel,

and Ahab the son of Omri

reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.

30 And Ahab the son of Omri

did evil in the sight of the Lord,

more than all who were before him.

31 And as if it had been a light thing for him

to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,

he took for his wife Jezebel

the daughter of Ethbaal

king of the Sidonians,

and went and served Baal

and worshiped him.

32 He erected an altar for Baal

in the house of Baal,

which he built in Samaria.

33 And Ahab made an Asherah.

Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger

than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

34 In his days

Hiel of Bethel built Jericho.

He laid its foundation

at the cost of Abiram his firstborn,

and set up its gates

at the cost of his youngest son Segub,

according to the word of the Lord,

which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

**Joshua 6:26** – *The Fall of Jericho* (ESV)

26 Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying,

“*Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho*.

*At the cost of his firstborn shall he*

*lay its foundation,*

*and at the cost of his youngest son*

*shall he set up its gates*.”

**Section A**

Section A abruptly introduces the prophet Elijah into the ongoing narrative of 1 Kgs with an *oath* to YHWH and a *promise* to Ahab of a coming drought. Note that §A is split around §B.

*Elijah Predicts a Drought*

1Now 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*.” …

**7**And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

**1 Kgs 17:1aα***.* The opening verse of 1 Kgs 17:1 is a ‘direct’ characterization by the narrator[[47]](#footnote-47) which raises more questions than it answers. 1 Kgs 17:1a (MT) אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִּי מִתֹּשָׁבֵי גִלְעָד literally reads ‘*Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe (of) Gilead*.’ Elijah is introduced abruptly, for the first time,[[48]](#footnote-48) with little more than his name אֵלִיָּהוּ (‘my God is Yahweh,’) [[49]](#footnote-49) and his identity, a ‘Tishbite’ (*uncertain meaning*)[[50]](#footnote-50) who hails from ‘Tishbe (of) Gilead’ (*uncertain origin*).[[51]](#footnote-51) Literally, Elijah is introduced as: ‘*My God is Yahweh*,’ ‘*no one*’ from ‘*nowhere*’ in Gilead. Although we are told nothing of his age or physical appearance, this is not unexpected.[[52]](#footnote-52) But his *name* is important for revealing his *character*, pointing toward his identity as a loyal follower of YHWH, and perhaps a zealous one at that.[[53]](#footnote-53)

**1 Kgs 17:1aβ-b***.* Elijah does not introduce himself as a *prophet*, nor does the narrator explicitly identify him as such with the traditional ‘*prophetic word formula*.’[[54]](#footnote-54) His startling entrance into the narrative is somewhat unexpected. “All other *prophets*, before and after Elijah, are introduced by *the word of the LORD came to* …, or the prophet says, “*This is what the LORD says*.””[[55]](#footnote-55) Elijah’s statement “*As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives*,” is a common OT expression.[[56]](#footnote-56) Its uniqueness is its concatenation with the following phrase “*before whom I stand*,”[[57]](#footnote-57) in itself a Hebrew idiom proclaiming a special relationship with YHWH.[[58]](#footnote-58) It is by the authority of this special relationship that Elijah claims to speak on behalf of YHWH. If true, Elijah is unique in this regard, but the underlying concern is if YHWH shares the same perspective.[[59]](#footnote-59) In light of 1 Kgs 16:29-34 we suspect that YHWH will execute *judgement* through a *prophet* against Ahab and the house of Omri.[[60]](#footnote-60) But the narrator’s reticence sets up a latent tension concerning Elijah’s character as he closes his drought proclamation with the idiomatic phrase “*except by my word*,”[[61]](#footnote-61) which is either a testament to his special relationship and evidence of his confidence in YHWH and the power of prayer,[[62]](#footnote-62) or a self-betrayal of unauthorized actions.[[63]](#footnote-63)

In spite of the ambiguity, there are several positive developing characteristics of Elijah. He shows commitment to YHWH and confidence in his standing with Him, and subsequently, courage, boldness, and a jealous passion for YHWH’s word and honor. Was Elijah justified in proclaiming the drought on the basis of Deut. 11:16-17? Yes. Was he authorized to do so? Perhaps, but if not, God obliged his special servant in spite of this error.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**Deut 11:16-17** – *Love and Serve the LORD* (ESV)

13 “And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14 he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. 15 And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full. 16 Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; 17 then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.

**1 Kgs 17:7***.* The closing of this section records YHWH’s *fulfillment* of Elijah’s *promise* of a coming *divine judgment* by means of a *drought*, and it is delayed by placing §B between the *promise* and its subsequent *fulfillment*.

**Section B**

Section B recounts YHWH sending Elijah to Wadi Cherith, His promise to sustain him there, Elijah’s obedience to YHWH’s command and YHWH’s fulfillment of His promises.

**2**And the word of the Lord came to him: **3**“Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. **4**You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” **5**So he went and did according to the word of the Lord. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. **6**And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

**1 Kgs 17:2-6**. Although Elijah has not been officially recognized as a *prophet* at this point in the narrative, YHWH’s sending of the *drought* seems to authenticate his special status. Here, the narrator reveals Elijah’s absolute compliance to the word of God through a *command-response* ‘*word-fulfillment*’ narrative dialogue between Elijah and YHWH,[[65]](#footnote-65) corresponding to prophetic standards of obedience.[[66]](#footnote-66) The three-fold repetition of the word ‘*eastward/east*’ could be a subtle, ironic condemnation of Elijah’s action. In Genesis, קֵ֑דְמָה (*east-ward*) is often associated with the concepts of mankind turning away from YHWH and judgment.[[67]](#footnote-67) Conversely, it also evidences YHWH’s gracious act of protection and provision in removing Elijah from the perceived danger of his present situation. [See ‘*Excursus on the OT concept of ‘East-ward’*’]

Finally, the two-fold repetition of the phrase “*bread and meat in the morning/evening*” reflects upon Exod. 16:8, 12 where the people were only fed once a day. This allusion invites the reader to view Elijah’s journey through the lens of the *Exodus*, and introduces what will become an increasingly recurring theme: Elijah as Moses *redivivus*,[[68]](#footnote-68) perhaps implying we should read this passage with one eye toward YHWH’s closing words to Moses in Exod. 16:12b, “*Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God*.”[[69]](#footnote-69) If so, “Elijah is receiving a lesson in faith.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

[See ‘*Excursus on Elijah as Moses Redivivus*’]

**Exodus 16:8, 12** – *Bread from Heaven* (ESV)

8 And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.”

12 “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

**Section C**

Section C is comprised of two distinct *sub-sections*: §C1 (17:8-16) and §C2 (17:17-24).

In **§C1**, YHWH sends Elijah to Zarephath and promises to provide for him there through a widowed woman. Elijah responds to YHWH’s command, meets and inquires of the widow, and experiences YHWH’s faithfulness and power as He fulfills His promises.

*The Widow of Zarephath*

**8**Then the word of the Lord came to him, **9**“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” **10**So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” **11**And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” **12**And she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” **13**And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. **14**For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” **15**And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. **16**The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

**1 Kgs 17:8-10a**. The narrator transitions the story from Wadi Cherith to Zarephath through the familiar *word-fulfillment pattern*, once again highlighting Elijah’s obedience. Yet, from this point forward, there will be subtle indications of Elijah’s increasing hesitation to respond obediently to YHWH’s commands.[[71]](#footnote-71) Note the similarity between this account of Elijah’s commission and that of the prophet Jonah:

**Jonah 1:1-3** – *Jonah Flees the Presence of the Lord* (ESV)

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” 3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

**Excursus on Jonah’s Journey** [ChatGPT]

When Jonah fled to avoid God's command to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-3), he headed west from Joppa toward Tarshish (likely in modern Spain or another far western location). This was in the opposite direction of Nineveh, emphasizing Jonah's attempt to evade God's call. If he had obeyed, Jonah would have traveled northeast to Nineveh.

**1 Kgs 17:10b-12**. Here, the narrator moves the *setting* and *point-of-view*, introducing a unit of dialogue between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.[[72]](#footnote-72) Although Elijah’s commands appear terse, the nature of his response is debated. Walsh suggests that his words are polite, perhaps even empathetic of the widows’ plight, which is interesting in light of his expectation that YHWH would provide for him through her.[[73]](#footnote-73) Olley disagrees with this interpretation, suggesting that Elijah’s response was in fact demanding and selfish.[[74]](#footnote-74)

**1 Kgs 17:13-16**. Elijah’s immediate response ‘*Do not fear*,’ (1 Kgs 17:13) is the beginning of a *salvation oracle* which directly implies Elijah’s *special* *prophetic status*, and will become a very important theme.[[75]](#footnote-75) In vs. 14, Elijah’s invocation of the divine promise oracle “*For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel*,” (1 Kgs 17:14) once again alludes to Elijah’s *suppressed* *prophetic status* in the narrative.[[76]](#footnote-76) In one sense, the true *miracle* here is that Elijah is being transformed into a *prophet*.[[77]](#footnote-77) His proclamation of “*Thus says the LORD*” is quickly followed by “*until the day the LORD sends rain*…”[[78]](#footnote-78) “It is God’s word that is determinative, not man’s. Elijah has learned his place in the scheme of things.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Note the broad similarities between this unit and Jesus’ ministry:

**John 4:7-10*ff*** – **Jesus and the Woman of Samaria** (ESV)

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” 13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” 15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

In **§C2**, as the widow’s son suddenly dies, Elijah takes the boy and prays over him to YHWH. YHWH hears Elijah’s prayer and restores his life, upon which the widow again witnesses the power and mercy of YHWH and Elijah’s authority as a *prophet*.

*Elijah Raises the Widow’s Son*

**17**After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. **18**And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” **19**And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. **20**And he cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” **21**Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again.” **22**And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23**And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” **24**And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.”

**1 Kgs 17:17-19**. In this section, the child’s death creates immediate tension in the narrative and segues into dialogue between Elijah and the widow. The widow seems to allude to Elijah as a *prophet* with her introduction in vs. 17: “*O man of God*?” But there is a hint of irony as she couples her acknowledgement of Elijah’s unique status as a “*man of God*,” not a ‘*prophet*,’ with the reason for her son’s death, especially in light of the previous unit.[[80]](#footnote-80) Elijah’s terse verbal reply and immediate response reflect his bold, decisive nature.

**1 Kgs 17:20-22**. Here the narrator presents two very short prayers from Elijah. In the *first*, Elijah seems to echo the widow’s accusatory tone and order of complaint to YHWH.[[81]](#footnote-81) This could imply that Elijah has a pejorative view of YHWH in this case, or, as Walsh suggests, could indicate Elijah’s obedience to the prophet’s role as a sympathetic mediator.[[82]](#footnote-82) Elijah’s *second* prayer is less accusatory and more respectful, and this time YHWH responds.[[83]](#footnote-83) Elijah has demonstrated tremendous power through YHWH which evidences his unique status, but the title of *prophet* remains ever elusive. Notice the similarities between this unit and Jesus’ ministry:

**Mark 7: 24-30** – *The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith* (ESV)

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. 25 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” 29 And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

**1 Kgs 17:23-24**. We might expect the widow to react with praise and thanksgiving toward Elijah, but her first words to him only reaffirm her understanding that he is a “*man of God*.” Her closing phrase could imply that Elijah is obedient to the “*word of the LORD*,” but seems directed toward *her* faith in YHWH.[[84]](#footnote-84) Provan disagrees with this view, suggesting that the widow’s response addresses her recognition of Elijah’s status.[[85]](#footnote-85) Furthermore, the widow’s response creates an *inclusio* with “*except by my word*” in 1 Kgs 17:1b and “*the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth*” in 17:24b.[[86]](#footnote-86) Elijah’s responsiveness to YHWH’s commands and YHWH’s responsiveness to Elijah’s requests with demonstrations of power confirm Elijah’s *special status*, but the proper title of *prophet* is withheld.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Through a series of events in chapter 17, the narrator reveals Elijah’s character through his *words* and *actions* in cycles of escalating intensity, portraying the development of Elijah from *special servant* to *prophet*, serving YHWH, the God who has power to provide sustenance, power over life and death, and who rules in Israel and beyond.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Notice how Jesus picks up on some of these themes at the beginning of his public ministry.

**Luke 4:18-30** – *Jesus Rejected at Nazareth* (ESV)

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

*because he has anointed me*

*to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives*

*and recovering of sight to the blind,*

*to set at liberty those who are oppressed*,

19 *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?” 23 And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘“Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” 24 And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

Now, notice again, some of the subtle *allusions* and *thematic* *parallels* with the *book of Jonah*:

**Jonah 3:10-4:5** – *Jonah's Anger and the Lord's Compassion* (ESV)

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” 10 And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

As the narrative moves to ch. 19, notice some of the upcoming *parallels* with the *book of Jonah* and *Moses*:

**1 Kings 19:1-8** – *Elijah Flees Jezebel* (ESV)

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 as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

**EXCURSUS ON THE CHARICTERIZATION OF ELIJAH**

\*According to Robert Cohn, **[**the… episodes concerning Elijah during the *drought* [Chs 17-18] form a clear literary sequence in which the author charts the rise of Elijah's prophetic powers. In each episode he confronts an increasingly more difficult problem which must be solved.

*First*, facing Ahab's certain revenge, he simply obeys Yahweh's word and passively accepts bread and meat from the ravens and water from the wadi ("*he went and did according to the word of the Lord*," ν 5).

*Second*, when the drought dries up the wadi, he again heeds the word of Yahweh and goes to the widow for food. The repetition of several key words links this episode to the first: "*commanded*" (vv 4, 9), "*dwell*" (vv 5, 9), "*feed*" (vv 4, 9), "*bread*" (vv 6, 11), "*rain*" (νν 7,14). Here however, in order to be fed, Elijah must also feed. The widow supplies the raw materials—flour and oil—which Elijah multiplies, pronouncing Yahweh's word. As Elijah obeyed Yahweh, now the woman obeys Elijah. To make the parallel clear and to point to the authority which Elijah exercises, the author repeats the response exactly: "*she went and did according to the word of Elijah*" (v 15). Although Yahweh had "*commanded*" the widow to feed him, Elijah must cope with her resistance. From passive recipient he has become active participant.

*Third*, when the woman's son dies unexpectedly, Elijah takes the matter—and the boy—into his own hands. Rather than enunciate Yahweh's word, Elijah accuses him (v 20) and prays to him (v 22). Yahweh then responds to Elijah's word, "*the Lord heard the voice of Elijah*" Here Elijah demonstrates fully the prophetic ability of intercession and successfully elicits Yahweh's aid. The woman's confession caps Elijah's rise to full prophetic maturity.**]** \*

[Robert L. Cohn, “*The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19*”]

**Section D**

Section D is a long section containing two distinct movements. In the *first*, YHWH sends Elijah to confront Ahab and the narrative changes to a parenthetical account concerning Ahab and Obadiah, priming the succeeding narrative.

*Elijah Confronts Ahab*

**1**After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “*Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth*.” **2**So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. **3**And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, **4**and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) **5**And Ahab said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals.” **6**So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.

**1 Kgs 18:1-2**. As the narrator moves the action of the story from Zarephath to Samaria, he will attempt “to prise apart Elijah and YHWH. It is here, where the narrative begins to joust with Elijah, that commentators begin to take sides.”[[89]](#footnote-89) This unit begins with the familiar *command-response* sequence, but YHWH is clear that ‘He’ will send the rain. Olley argues that the syntax suggests YHWH’s actions will be conditioned upon Elijah’s obedience.[[90]](#footnote-90) But ironically, Elijah is only instructed to appear; the narrator is quite reticent.[[91]](#footnote-91)

**1 Kgs 18:3-6**. Here, the narrator shifts to dialogue between Ahab and Obadiah and sets up Obadiah as a *foil* to Elijah. Obadiah is introduced as a servant of YHWH in a precarious dilemma within Ahab’s court. His “position is unsustainable; sooner or later he will have to make a choice between his position and his convictions.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

The *second* major movement of Section D chronicles Elijah’s encounter with Obadiah and concludes with a succinct description of the encounter between Elijah and Ahab. Ahab betrays his guilt by accusing Elijah of being the ‘*troubler of Israel*.’ Elijah offers a *counter-rebuke* and issues YHWH’s *pleadings* against Ahab, revealing the actual reason for the judgment of drought: Ahab’s apostasy.[[93]](#footnote-93) *Finally*, Elijah commands Ahab to *summon* the people to Mount Carmel.

**7**And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, “*Is it you, my lord Elijah*?” **8**And he answered him, “*It is I. Go, tell your lord*, ‘*Behold, Elijah is here*.’” **9**And he said, “*How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me*? **10***As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say,* ‘*He is not here*,’ *he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you*. **11***And now you say*, ‘Go, tell your lord, “*Behold, Elijah is here*.”’ **12***And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the Lord will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth*. **13***Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord’s prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water*? **14***And now you say*, ‘*Go, tell your lord*, “*Behold, Elijah is here*”’; *and he will kill me*.” **15**And Elijah said, “*As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today*.” **16**So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah.

**17**When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” **18**And he answered, “*I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals*. **19***Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table*.”

**1 Kgs 18:7-16**. The reader might expect Elijah to embrace a follower of YHWH, but is quickly and ironically disappointed.[[94]](#footnote-94) The narrator’s casting of Obadiah as *foil* to Elijah and his parenthetical affirmation of Obadiah in 18:3b-4 arouses sympathy for Obadiah and casts a shadow on Elijah’s prophetic call to identify with and mediate for the people.[[95]](#footnote-95)

In spite of Obadiah’s reverential greeting,[[96]](#footnote-96) Elijah’s coarse response in vs. 8 is accusatory, “*Go, tell your lord*.” (1 Kgs 18:8) Elijah challenges Obadiah to live up to his name (‘*servant of YHWH*’)[[97]](#footnote-97) and confession of faith, motivating Obadiah to respond with a long pleading argument defending his faith and actions.[[98]](#footnote-98) Ironically, Elijah’s demand requires him to profess his faith in YHWH to Ahab: (‘*my God is YHWH’… is here*.’)[[99]](#footnote-99) Elijah listens to Obadiah’s *petition*, but remains resolute. Millgram summarizes the situation:

Obadiah’s “life epitomizes the condition of an entire nation, and through him we are coming to understand the condition of the people of Israel at this historic juncture...The choice to which Elijah has driven Obadiah he now intends to drive an entire people.”[[100]](#footnote-100)

**1 Kgs 18:17-20**. Here, the narrator presents dialogue between Ahab (*foil*) and Elijah (*protagonist*) in a hostile exchange of *accusation* and *counter-accusation*,[[101]](#footnote-101) and his reticence invites a series of questions concerning Elijah. There is no mention by the narrator or Elijah that he has been explicitly instructed by YHWH to summon the people and issue a direct challenge, opening the door to question whether this is Elijah’s idea and whether YHWH is even on board.[[102]](#footnote-102) Millgram suggests that “from this point onward Elijah is on his own, making a gamble of monumental proportions with no Divine guarantee of success.”[[103]](#footnote-103) Ryken seems to disagree (perhaps alluding to 1 Kgs 16:29-34), arguing that Ahab is directly culpable as *king* and Elijah is acting dutifully as *prophet* with YHWH’s approval.[[104]](#footnote-104)

**Section E**

In Section E, Elijah approaches the people and challenges their loyalties between Baal and YHWH. Their *silence* is condemning, as was Ahab’s caustic *accusation*, both vindicating YHWH’s *judgment* of drought upon the land. This *pause* is the focal point of 1 Kings 17-18 and it beckons the reader to hesitate and reflect. YHWH has already acted in *initial judgment* through the institution of a *drought* against both king and people, and now, both have been *petitioned* and *summoned* retrospectively. Will YHWH complete their sentencing and execute further *judgment*?

*The Prophets of Baal Defeated*

**20**So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

**21**And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “*How long will you go limping between two different opinions*? *If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him*.” And the people did not answer him a word.

Note some of the OT references that speak to the *polarity* of this theme of YWHW’s demand for *exclusive covenant loyalty*:

**Deut 30:19-20** – *The Choice of Life and Death* (ESV)

19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

**Josh 24:14-15** – *Choose Whom You Will Serve* (ESV)

14 “Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

**Revelation 3:15-16** – *To the Church in Laodicea* (ESV)

15 “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

**Section E'**

In Section E' we find YHWH, through Elijah’s proposal, turning the tables on the people, changing their status from *defendants* in a covenantal lawsuit, to *jury* (superficially), to *fact witnesses* of YHWH’s divine power, mercy and grace.[[105]](#footnote-105) Through Elijah’s challenge, YHWH actually de-escalates the narrative tension, giving the people a second chance to recant their initial response of *silence* and reconsider the facts.

**22**Then Elijah said to the people, “*I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.* ***23****Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it*. **24***And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God*.” And all the people answered, “*It is well spoken*.”

**1 Kgs 18:21-24**. The narrator moves the action to Mount Carmel and the dialogue centers upon Elijah, the people of Israel, and the prophets of Baal with Elijah as YHWH’s representative (implied) and the prophets of Baal representing a non-existant idol deity.[[106]](#footnote-106) In vs. 21, Elijah take charge and directly challenges the people with an *either/or* proposition. The failure of the people to respond suggests that they “reject Elijah’s basic premise, that of *choice*,”[[107]](#footnote-107) exposing their syncretistic worldview and strengthening Elijah’s claims against them. Elijah’s response is interesting. In vs. 22 he claims that “*I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD*…” (18:22a) In light of his previous conversation with Obadiah, this statement either casts a shadow on Elijah’s integrity, or betrays a narrow understanding of the prophetic office.[[108]](#footnote-108) Furthermore, it is the first time that Elijah himself claims to be a ‘*prophet*’ of the LORD.

In vs. 24, Elijah, while addressing the people, appears to place them squarely on the side of Baal by juxtaposing his position with their own. If so, their response “*It is well spoken*” suggests not only that they agree to the terms of the contest, but that they agree with Elijah’s assessment that their loyalties are to “*your (their) god*,” Baal. If so, Elijah is likely encouraged by their response since their acceptance of the terms is a step toward *monotheism* as it “implies a willingness to consider choosing between gods.”[[109]](#footnote-109)

**EXCURSUS ON THE THEMES OF E-JM (**1 KGS 18:17-24)

There are three specific themes alluded to throughout 1 Kgs 18:17-24 which in various ways support the thesis that *thematic center* of 1 Kgs 17-18 occurs at 1 Kgs 18:21-24. Collectively, they are the theological foundation and point of departure from which the entire polemic against Baalism and Israel’s syncretistic apostasy are derived and developed in 1 Kgs 17-18. A working acronym for these three themes is ‘E-JM’. ‘E’ represents the theme of ‘*exclusive covenant loyalty*’, while ‘J’ corresponds to the theme of ‘*justice*’ and ‘M’ to the theme of ‘*mercy*’.

The E-JM themes in 1 Kgs 17-18 are distinct, yet-inseparable, and addressed in concert with other themes/motifs such as *kingship*, *divine sovereignty*, *covenant*, et al. The Old Testament addresses various aspects of these themes/motifs through a complex, interwoven tapestry of smaller textual units, each with its own unique perspective, focus and emphasis, while their prevalence ebbs and flows throughout the canon. And as I will argue, the very summit of the E-JM themes will occur in 1 Kgs 18:21-24. [[110]](#footnote-110)

Now, while it’s important to associate 1 Kgs 17-18 and particularly (18:21-4) with relevant biblical-theological trajectories, we must do so responsibly. So, although I am identifying (18:21-4) as the *center* of 1 Kgs 17-18, I am not arguing for a *central theme, single center* or *metanarrative* hermeneutic per se. My intention is to merely to discern the logical organization and design of 1 Kgs 17-18, to assess its primary features, and to reflect on its meaning in light of the influence the overall structure of the text itself conveys, while noting its association to broader biblical-theological categories, concepts and concerns[[111]](#footnote-111).

*First,* A brief survey of four English translations and twenty-two commentaries, with minor exception, demonstrates widespread agreement among translators regarding sectional and sub-unit level boundaries in 1 Kgs 17, but not for 1 Kgs 18, supporting the idea of employing a *larger organizing schema* to represent the logical structure of the text. At this point, Dorsey,[[112]](#footnote-112) Long,[[113]](#footnote-113) and Cohn[[114]](#footnote-114) each provide helpful insight, supporting the argument that 1 Kgs 17-18 should be depicted as a *large-scale chiasm* demonstrating in one sense, “a clear thematic structure, the movement from *divine word* (17:1; 18:1) to its *fulfillment in human events* (18:41-6),”[[115]](#footnote-115) and simultaneously, the distinct, yet-inseparable E-JM themes.

*Second*, YHWH’s purpose appears two-fold: *first*, the desire to redeem Israel ‘*from*’ the Baals, and ‘*to*’ Himself, which occurs (albeit temporarily) in 18:39 (יְהוָה֙ ה֣וּא הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים), and *second*, to accomplish this through His prophet Elijah, whom He is establishing with authority. In doing so, YHWH demonstrates His sovereign power and legitimizes Elijah before his audience. I believe this motif expresses the general movement of the whole of 1 Kings 17-18.

*Third*, the theme of YHWH’s demand for ‘*exclusive covenant loyalty*’ (ECL) is supported directly in 18:21-4. [See ‘Plotting the Text’] Through the use of *strident* *polarity* and *binary comparison/contrasting* elements, the text clearly identifies the key characters along a *dynamic relationship continuum*. As this theme summits, it isolates the key issue: YHWH’s demand for ECL. On a longer trajectory, 1 Kgs 1-16 and precursory portions of the Old Testament each contribute to the context and precedent for this particular theme.

*Fourth*, in terms of ‘*judgment*’, the pervasive theme of ‘*drought*’ operating in the background of the text from (17:1) forward summits *initially* in 1 Kings (18:17b-18) with Ahab’s rebuke, Elijah’s counter-rebuke and petitions. Ahab’s accusation at (18:17b) confirms the validity of YHWH’s judgment. The *second* summit occurs at (18:21) as Elijah exhorts the people to decide who they will follow, their guilt exposed in silence. The *third* summit occurs at (18:40) with Elijah and Israel slaughtering the prophets of Baal at Wadi Kishon, and the *final* summit occurs at (18:45a) as YHWH provides rain, relinquishing the drought. Beginning at (17:1), rising at (18:1), and falling at (18:40), in an *already-not yet* trajectory,[[116]](#footnote-116) YHWH initiates a cycle of ‘*judgment*’ and ‘*mercy*’ upon Ahab and Israel in accordance with His covenantal expectations.

*Fifth*, the theme of ‘*mercy*’ appears at (17:16) with YHWH providing for the widow’s household during the drought and at (17:32) with YHWH restoring life to her son. Again, at (18:4, 13), Obadiah’s provision for the prophets of YHWH under persecution demonstrates the theme of ‘*mercy*’. These events foreshadow the summit of the theme which occurs at (18:22-4). Immediately after the people are exposed of their guilt through silence (וְלֹֽא־עָנ֥וּ הָעָ֛ם אֹת֖וֹ דָּבָֽר), Elijah proposes a contest between YHWH and Baal. As the reader anticipates ‘*judgment*,’ the text suggests that the contest is foremost an act of divine ‘*mercy*’ goading them toward the proper response. The Baal, as Elijah knows and sarcastically mocks, is powerless. The people demand a sign, and in this instance, YHWH chooses to oblige both Elijah and Israel.[[117]](#footnote-117)

**PLOTTING THE TEXT** (1 KGS 18:17-24)

Plotting unveils the *polarity* of the text and a series of *binary elements* which highlight YHWH’s demand for ECL. Note the *continuum of revealed characters* exposing Israel’s status:





**‘Post Hoc Allegation & Counter-Pleading’**

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him,

“Is it you, you troubler of Israel?”

And he answered,

“I have not troubled Israel,

but you have, and your father’s house,

because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord

and followed the Baals.

**‘Summons’**

Now therefore send and gather

all Israel to me at Mount Carmel,

and the 450 prophets of Baal

and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

So Ahab sent to

all the people of Israel

and gathered

the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

**‘Chief Complaint & Self-Incriminating First Answer’**

And Elijah came near to all the people and said,

“How long will you go limping between *two* different opinions?

If the Lord is God, [then] follow him;

but if Baal, then follow him.

“And the people did not answer him a word.

**‘YHWH’s Demonstration of Mercy’**

Then Elijah said to the people,

“I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord,

but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.

Let two bulls be given to us,

and let them choose one bull for themselves

and cut it in pieces

and lay it on the wood,

but put no *fire* to it.

And I will prepare the other bull

and lay it on the wood

and put no *fire* to it.

And you call upon the name of your god,

and I will call upon the name of the Lord,

and the God who answers by *fire*, he is God.”

And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.” [[118]](#footnote-118)

**Section D'**

In Section D', YHWH, through Elijah, exposes ‘the Baal’ and his prophets as imposters. Elijah instructs the prophets in the order of events and they fail through their efforts to elicit a response. Baal is silent. As Elijah mocks them in their predicament, they amplify their efforts, but to no avail. (“…*there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention*.[[119]](#footnote-119))

**25**Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “*Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it*.” **26**And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “*O Baal, answer us*!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. **27**And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “*Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened*.” **28**And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. **29**And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

**1 Kgs 18:25-29**. In term of characterization, Elijah’s mocking of the prophets of Baal invites us to associate his response with his character, but commentators seem to disagree over the level of confidence we can derive from what is recorded, despite the obvious sarcasm.[[120]](#footnote-120) Furthermore, Elijah’s *command* to the people in vs. 30, “*Come near me*,” and their *response* could allude to Elijah’s confidence both in YHWH to act and for the people to respond. If not, at least the narrator is foreshadowing their future course of direction.[[121]](#footnote-121)

Note in vs. 29, when the narrator says “…*but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention*.” Baal does not answer or speak, but the narrator says it in such a way as to not even acknowledge Baal’s existence; it just says, “*there was no voice*.” And he says “*No one answered*,” insinuating that because there is ‘no Baal,’ there is ‘no answerer.’ Finally he says, “*no one paid attention*.” The people have lost interest in Baal, which is reinforced by Elijah’s *command* to the people to “*come near to me*” and their immediate *response*. They are gaining interest in YHWH.

**Section C****'**

In Section C', YHWH demonstrates His power through Elijah before the audience on Mount Carmel. Elijah gathers the people, prepares the altar and burnt offering, and instructs the people to soak the altar and the offering repeatedly with water. He then calls upon YHWH to reveal to the people that He alone is God, that it is YHWH who is turning their hearts back to Himself (an important distinction), and that Elijah is His *prophet*. Climactically, YHWH devours the altar and burnt offering as §C' concludes with the people’s emphatic response: יְהוָה֙ ה֣וּא הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים.

**30**Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. **31**Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “*Israel shall be your name*,” **32**and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. **33**And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “*Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood*.” **34**And he said, “*Do it a second time*.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “*Do it a third time*.” And they did it a third time. **35**And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

**36**And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “*O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word*. **37***Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back*.” **38**Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. **39**And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “*The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God*.”

**1 Kgs 18:30-39**. Notice that the order of events is, so-to-speak, *out of order* in relation to Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple. Here, the people are not only *asking* for a sign, but they had to be *goaded into it* by Elijah. Is it possible that this is pointing to YHWH’s patience and grace toward both His *prophet* (who set up the contest) and His *people* (who are demanding the sign)?

**1 Kgs 8:35-40**– *Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication* (ESV)

35 “**When** heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, **if** they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, 36 **then** hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, **when** you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

37 “**If** there is famine in the land, **if** there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar, **if** their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, 38 whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, 39 **then** hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind), 40 **that** they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our fathers.

And notice also in 18:30, the narrator ‘*breaks frame*’ and alludes to symbolic imagery from antecedent OT texts that associate Elijah’s actions with major events and themes. In Deut. 12, Israel is commanded not only to destroy *all* the places where their enemies served false gods, such as the ‘*high places*,’ but they were to worship *only* in the place where God would choose to put his name and dwell, which at this point was the *temple*. So, is this a subtle condemnation of Elijah’s challenge, or is God making a special exception for the *people* and/or his *prophet*, Elijah?

**Deuteronomy 12:1-5** – *The LORD’s Chosen Place of Worship* (ESV)

1 “These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. 2 You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. 4 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. 5 But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go,

In this next example, Elijah is reminding the people that YHWH had *claimed*, *redeemed,* and *named* them. So, in some sense, Elijah seems to be reminding the crowd (*people* and *king*) that the NK and SK are ultimately one people of God. Furthermore, note that YWHW’s coming fire *judgment* will fall on the twelve symbolic stones, not on the people themselves, which not only foreshadows immediate events, but could further allude to Christ on the cross, where YHWH demonstrates most vividly the themes of *judgment* and *mercy*.

**Josh 4:1-7*ff*** – *Twelve Memorial Stones from the Jordan* (ESV)

1 When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, 2 “*Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man*, 3 *and command them, saying*, ‘*Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight*.’” 4 Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 5 And Joshua said to them, “*Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel*, 6 *that this may be a sign among you.*

*When your children ask in time to come*, ‘*What do those stones mean to you*?’ 7 *then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever*.”

Here, Elijah is reminding the people that YHWH had both *claimed*, *redeemed,* and *named* them.

**Gen 35:9-15** – *God Blesses and Renames Jacob* (ESV)

9 God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. 10 And God said to him, “*Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name*.” So he called his name Israel. 11 And God said to him, “*I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body*. 12 *The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you*.” 13 Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

As the narrator ‘*returns to frame*,’ he begins to give some insight into Elijah’s character in vv. 36-8. In vs. 36, the narrator formally identifies Elijah as a *prophet*.[[122]](#footnote-122) And notice that the first part of Elijah’s prayer contains three requests to YHWH, two of which are focused upon him. *First*,

Elijah prays that they would know “this day” (urgently) “that you are God in Israel.” Isn’t this a little too narrow? *Second*, Elijah prays that the people might know that “*I am your servant*” (not *prophet*). And *third*, that “*I have done all these things at your word*.” Ironically, the narrator finally acknowledges Elijah as a *prophet* but Elijah doesn’t claim that status before YHWH. Is it because in qualifying his actions “*I have done all these things at your word*” he is tacitly admitting that he has acted, at least in part, on his own accord? I remain undecided, but Millgram suggests that:

“The fact that the narrator studiously refrains from even hinting…that God ordered Elijah to force the contest…lead[s] me to the conclusion that the entire episode is Elijah’s initiative, and that now what he is seeking is God’s public approval for his actions…*ex post facto*.”[[123]](#footnote-123)

Notice in vs 39, as YHWH acts and fire falls from heaven, the people fall to their knees in confession: “*YHWH, he (is) God; YHWH, he (is) God*.”[[124]](#footnote-124) This raises the question: Did YHWH’s response only occur in response to the second part of the prayer? The narrator is *doubly reticent*. What were “*all these things*”? What precipitated YHWH’s response? Is YHWH confirming Elijah’s role as his *servant* and that he did “*all these things*” at His word? Or is he showing us that YHWH, by not responding to the initial set of petitions in Elijah’s prayer, is actually giving us a response to both parts? In the second set of petitions, YHWH affirms that He *is* God, not just “*in Israel*. By not responding to Elijah’s initial petitions “*that I am your servant*,” and *“that I have done all these things at your word*,” is the narrator giving us subtle confirmation that Elijah has acted out of line? Several writers have argued that in Elijah’s second petition, his request that the people may know that “*you have turned their hearts back*” is an inadvertent *double entendre* that actually accuses YHWH of causing their apostasy.[[125]](#footnote-125) I remain unconvinced. Either way, the narrator is showing us YHWH’s patience and grace toward His *people*, His *prophet*, and the *king* in vivid detail.

Look at the imagery surrounding YHWH’s ‘consuming’ of both the *offering* and the *altar*. Nothing escapes the divine fire. Once this ‘*high place*’ altar has served its purpose, YHWH destroys it. And isn’t it interesting that the people only *fall* on their faces to worship when the fire *fell* from heaven. Although the people acknowledge YHWH as God, it ironically underscores the reality that ‘*idols, though nothing in reality, are something to idolaters*.’ Finally, in vs. 38, notice the OT imagery related to the inauguration of both the *tabernacle* and the *temple*.

**Leviticus 9:22-24** – *The LORD Accepts Aaron’s Offering* (ESV)

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. 24 And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

**2 Chronicles 7:1-3** – *Fire from Heaven* (ESV)

1 As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 2 And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. 3 When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

**Section B'**

Section B' is only one verse (18:40), but it is complete and includes distinct C/R features. It also ironically echoes §B as addressed above. In short, Elijah *commands* the people to take the prophets of Baal down to Wadi Kishon and destroy them. And they *respond*, abruptly.

**40**And Elijah said to them, “*Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape*.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

**1 Kgs 18:40**. Here, commentators disagree over the moral judgment in Elijah’s slaughtering of the prophets of Baal. Nelson suggests that Elijah acted rightfully “in accordance with Deuteronomistic principles (Deut. 13:13-15) and to offset Jezebel’s murder of the Yahweh prophets.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Milgram disagrees, suggesting that:

“Elijah has triumphed, and success has gone to his head; he has no intention of being magnanimous in victory” ... No longer a “powerless fugitive.” “In this brief moment in time power has passed into his hands: the inflamed masses before him are malleable material, ready to be formed into a sword that can be wielded to his purposes. Elijah grasps the sword.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

Notice some of the allusions to antecedent OT imagery in this unit:

**Exodus 32:25-29** – *The Golden Calf* (ESV)

25 And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. 27 And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. 29 And Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”

**Deuteronomy 13:1-5** – *Warning Against Idolatry* (ESV)

1 “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. 5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

**Section A'**

Section A begins with Elijah predicting rain, tying this final section to (17:1) by signaling, like (18:1b), the beginning of the end to the *drought*. Elijah sends Ahab up Mount Carmel and instructs his servant to look for signs of rain. Eventually he observes a small cloud forming and Elijah sends him *up* Mount Carmel to tell Ahab to come *down* for rain is coming. Finally, YHWH sends the rain as Ahab and Elijah race toward Jezreel, transitioning the narrative to 1 Kgs 19.

*The Lord Sends Rain*

**41**And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain.” **42**So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. **43**And he said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” And he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said, “Go again,” seven times. **44**And at the seventh time he said, “Behold, a little cloud like a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.’” **45**And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. **46**And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

**1 Kgs 18:41-46**. The narrator shifts the action from the banks of the Kishon back to the heights of Carmel and Elijah dialogues briefly with Ahab and then with his servant. Elijah’s *command* and *prediction* to Ahab are interesting. The narrator never suggests that Elijah commanded the rain “*by his word*,” but that “*there is the sound of the rushing of rain*.” The pace and terseness of the dialogue between Elijah and his servant may betray his impatience,[[128]](#footnote-128) but conversely reveals his commitment to prayer and confidence that YHWH will send the rain.[[129]](#footnote-129) The people have responded to YHWH, but has Ahab? If not, will he?

In vv 41-44, Olley suggests that Ahab’s eating and drinking was a reaffirmation of the covenant with the people.[[130]](#footnote-130) This would suggest that Elijah, in light of the response of the people, believes that Ahab has been converted as well, as he instructs him to reaffirm his covenant obligations as king. Is Elijah too optimistic and/or naive? The prophet running ahead of the king could also symbolize the prophet acting as the king’s herald. In this light, it’s interesting that Elijah would be heading straight for Jezreel to herald the news to Jezebel and the king’s court. The news of the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, a counterblow to Jezebel’s pogrom, and the turning of the people toward YHWH would have enraged Jezebel and primes the narrative for her vicious response in Chapter 19.

There is also an interesting word play in verses 40-44. The word ‘*down*’ **ירד**is used in vs. 40 and in vs. 44, bracketing the word for ‘*up*’ **עלה**, which is used seven times in between. It’s interesting that the derivations of the word ‘*up*’ **עלה** occurs seven times in the covenant confirmation narrative of Exodus 24. This is a strong argument for the allusion here to Exodus 24.

**Exodus 24:9-11** – *The Covenant Confirmed* (ESV)

9 Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. 11 And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Note also that Ahab precedes Elijah in his flight to Jezreel. Elijah, under ‘*the hand of the LORD*’ (vs. 46) overtakes him, symbolizing the ideal order of the *king* following the *prophet*.[[131]](#footnote-131) This may suggest that Elijah had assumed too much, and that Ahab was not yet converted, but conversely, that Elijah and YHWH had not given up on him either. [[132]](#footnote-132)

**INTEGRATING TEXT & LIFE**

In 1 Kgs 18:21, Elijah exposes the core issue in the larger narrative of 1 Kgs 17-18:

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.[[133]](#footnote-133)

In a certain sense, this question, so central to the text of 1 Kgs 18:17-24, applies to us today as much as it did to Israel on Mount Carmel. The following quotes are just a few examples of biblical texts that support the primary themes in this central narrative:

**YHWH is God. There is no other.**

**Deuteronomy 32:36-39 –** *The Song of Moses*(ESV)

36 For the Lord will vindicate his people

and have compassion on his servants,

when he sees that their power is gone

and there is none remaining, bond or free.

37 Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods,

the rock in which they took refuge,

38 who ate the fat of their sacrifices

and drank the wine of their drink offering?

Let them rise up and help you;

let them be your protection!

39 “‘See now that I, even I, am he,

and there is no god beside me;

I kill and I make alive;

I wound and I heal;

and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

**Isaiah 44:6** – *Besides Me There Is No God* (ESV)

6 Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel

and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:

“I am the first and I am the last;

besides me there is no god.

**Isaiah 45:5-6** – *Cyrus, God’s Instrument* (ESV)

5 I am the Lord, and there is no other,

besides me there is no God;

I equip you, though you do not know me,

6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun

and from the west, that there is none besides me;

I am the Lord, and there is no other.

**Isaiah 45:18** – *The Lord, the Only Savior* (ESV)

18 For thus says the Lord,

who created the heavens

(he is God!),

who formed the earth and made it

(he established it;

he did not create it empty,

he formed it to be inhabited!):

“I am the Lord, and there is no other.

**Isaiah 46:9** – *The Idols of Babylon and the One True God* (ESV)

8 “Remember this and stand firm,

recall it to mind, you transgressors,

9 remember the former things of old;

for I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me,”

**All idolatry is vanity: the identity of the idol itself, like הַבַּעַל, doesn’t really matter.**

**Isa 40:18-20** – *The Greatness of God* (ESV)

18 To whom then will you liken God,

or what likeness compare with him?

19 An idol! A craftsman casts it,

and a goldsmith overlays it with gold

and casts for it silver chains.

20 He who is too impoverished for an offering

chooses wood that will not rot;

he seeks out a skillful craftsman

to set up an idol that will not move.

**Isa 46:5-13** – *The Idols of Babylon and the One True God* (ESV)

5 “To whom will you liken me and make me equal,

and compare me, that we may be alike?

6 Those who lavish gold from the purse,

and weigh out silver in the scales,

hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;

then they fall down and worship!

7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it,

they set it in its place, and it stands there;

it cannot move from its place.

If one cries to it, it does not answer

or save him from his trouble.

8 “Remember this and stand firm,

recall it to mind, you transgressors,

9 remember the former things of old;

for I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me,

10 declaring the end from the beginning

and from ancient times things not yet done,

saying, ‘*My counsel shall stand,*

*and I will accomplish all my purpose*,’

11 calling a bird of prey from the east,

the man of my counsel from a far country.

I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;

I have purposed, and I will do it.

12 “Listen to me, you stubborn of heart,

you who are far from righteousness:

13 I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off,

and my salvation will not delay;

I will put salvation in Zion,

for Israel my glory.”

**1 Cor 8:4-6** – *Food Offered to Idols* (ESV)

4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

**God shares His glory with no one.**

**Exodus 20:1-6** – *The Ten Commandments* (ESV); Deut. 5:6-8

1 And God spoke all these words, saying,

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**Isaiah 42:8** – *The LORD’s Chosen Servant* (ESV)

I am the Lord; that is my name;

my glory I give to no other,

nor my praise to carved idols.

**There is one God, YHWH, creator of heaven and earth.**

**Genesis 1:1** – *The Creation of the World* (ESV)

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

**Psalm 146:5-7** – *Put Not Your Trust in Princes* (ESV)

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the Lord his God,

6 who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

7 who executes justice for the oppressed,

who gives food to the hungry.

**2 Kings 19:15** – *Hezekiah’s Prayer* (ESV)

**15**And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: “O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

**And YHWH claims rightful title to His people and the primacy of their affections.**

**Deut. 6:10-15** – *The Greatest Commandment* (ESV)

10 “And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— 15 for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

**Matthew 6:24** – *Lay Up Treasures in Heaven* (ESV)

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

**As image bearers, we are called to love Him will all our hearts, minds and souls.**

**Deut. 6:4-5** – *The Greatest Commandment* (ESV)

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

**Matthew 22:34-40** – *The Great Commandment* (ESV)

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

**God is merciful, gracious, and loving, patient, longsuffering and slow to anger.**

**Exodus 34:6-7** – *Moses Makes New Tablets* (ESV)

6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

**Numbers 14:18** – *Moses Intercedes for the People* (ESV)

18 ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

**Psalm 86:15** – *Great Is Your Steadfast Love* (ESV)

15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

**Yet, YHWH is also righteous, and demands ECL.**

These most basic truths, revealed so powerfully in 1 Kgs 18:21-24, form the very foundation of a distinctly biblical, Christian worldview. May we all, like Joshua, proclaim with bold conviction:

**“… *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*.”**

**Joshua 24:14-28** – *Choose Whom You Will Serve* (ESV)

14 “Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, 17 for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. 18 And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

19 But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” 21 And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord.” 22 Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” 23 He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.” 24 And the people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.” 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. 26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.” 28 So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

**ELIJAH IN RETROSPECT**

Elijah’s character emerges through word and deed, comparison, dialogue, and a variety of rhetorical devices, portraying his capacity for change.[[134]](#footnote-134) He is cast as the prototypical prophet, personifying the role in the ordinary private realm of everyday people and life in chapter 17, and the public political sphere in chapter 18.[[135]](#footnote-135) Elijah is a bold, determined, zealous servant of YHWH[[136]](#footnote-136) who functions as prophet, miracle worker, preacher, and political reformer, [[137]](#footnote-137) demonstrating faith, obedience to YHWH, and a life committed to prayer and biblical worship.[[138]](#footnote-138) And his self-absorption and ego-centricities rightly center the narrative on its primary protagonist, YHWH, whose “…ways are more diverse than the single-minded thrust of Elijah’s life.”[[139]](#footnote-139)

“Nevertheless, it is evident that YHWH continues to care for him, to use him and to confirm his word...Any criticism is between YHWH and Elijah...Within the narrated world there is no public criticism. The narrator tells the story in a way that, while affirming the power of YHWH, illustrates that confrontation and dramatic acts… [are] not the only way forward. There is a role for quiet, dedicated and faithful service, both inside and outside the land.”[[140]](#footnote-140)

Elijah is not an enigma. Like the God he served we can know him truly but not completely. Elijah’s character, like our own lives, demonstrates a capacity for change, and therefore the need to evaluate his life retrospectively.[[141]](#footnote-141) And for Elijah, 1 Kgs 17-18 is only the beginning; there are many more surprising aspects of his character yet to discover.

**TABLING THE TEXT (**1 KGS 18:17-24)

1 Kgs 18:17-20 begins with head linkage וַיְהִ֛י כִּרְא֥וֹת אַחְאָ֖ב, with וַיְהִ֛י introducing the *ptn*-sequence. The significance of the names אַחְאָ֖ב (*father's brother; just like the father "Omri"*) and אֵלִיָּ֑הוּ (*Yahweh is God*) cannot be overstated. The *ptc* phrase עֹכֵ֥ר יִשְׂרָאֵֽל *(‘O’ troubler of Israel*) includes עֹכֵ֥ר (*entangle, bring disaster, throw into confusion, ruin*) and יִשְׂרָאֵֽל (*Israel; to/he strive(s), contend(s) with God).* The *protasis* לֹ֤א עָכַ֙רְתִּי֙, and *apodosis* are introduced by the conj. phrase כִּ֥י אִם־אַתָּ֖ה (*rather you*) with the *c-np* וּבֵ֣ית אָבִ֑יךָ (*and the house of your father*), referring to Omri. The Hebrew idiom, וַתֵּ֖לֶךְ אַחֲרֵ֥י הַבְּעָלִֽים means "to worship idols of Baal". And הַבְּעָלִֽים (*'lord'* or *'nameless numinous beings'*) is articulated, denying Baal the privilege of proper identity.

1 Kgs 18:21 begins with עַד־מָתַ֞י אַתֶּ֣ם פֹּסְחִים֮ meaning (*until/when; or how long*). The *pp* עַל־שְׁתֵּ֣י הַסְּעִפִּים֒ is a figurative expression (*How long will you…“sit on the fence,” “keep hopping back and forth between two opinions?"*). Two successive *if/then* clauses occur: first the *apodosis* אִם־יְהוָ֤ה הָֽאֱלֹהִים֙ (*if Yahweh [is] the God*) followed by the *protasis* לְכ֣וּ אַחֲרָ֔יו (*go after him*). Second, the *apodosis* וְאִם־הַבַּ֖עַל (*and/but if the Baal*) followed by the *protasis* לְכ֣וּ אַחֲרָ֑יו (*go after him*).

In 1 Kgs 18:22-4, a sequence of positive volitives (*wci, 3mp, jussives*), are followed by the fronted prohibitive וְאֵ֖שׁ לֹ֣א יָשִׂ֑ימוּ (*and/but fire not let them put [to it]*). Elijah's address changes from third to second person with וּקְרָאתֶ֞ם (*to call*), and introduces the *c-np* בְּשֵׁ֣ם אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶ֗ם (*and/then you call on the name of your God*). The polarity is magnified by fronting וַֽאֲנִי֙ אֶקְרָ֣א, followed by the contrasting בְשֵׁם־יְהוָ֔ה (*on the name of Yahweh*). The *r-c* אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲנֶ֥ה בָאֵ֖שׁ (*who [he] shall answer by fire*) functions apodictically, introducing the consequential truth to be acknowledged: ה֣וּא הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים with the resumptive *pn* ה֣וּא and *c-np* הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים (*the God*). The verb וַיַּ֧עַן (*to reply, answer*) and *c-np* כָּל־הָעָ֛ם (*all of the people; Israel*) is followed by the epexegetical use of וַיֹּאמְר֖וּ for rhetorical effect. The closing response ט֥וֹב הַדָּבָֽר basically means (*we agree*).

**CONTOURING THE TEXT** (1 KGS 18:17-24)

1 Kgs 18:17-24 reveals multiple semantic repetitions/patterns. In the closing sub-unit of §D' (17-20) we find both *antithetical* and *climactic parallelism* in (17-18) and at (19-20) closure of the binary *command/response* dialogue denotes a transition in the flow of the text.

17       וַיְהִ֛י כִּרְא֥וֹת אַחְאָ֖ב אֶת־אֵלִיָּ֑הוּ

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אַחְאָב֙ אֵלָ֔יו

הַאַתָּ֥ה זֶ֖ה עֹכֵ֥ר יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃

18       וַיֹּ֗אמֶר

לֹ֤א עָכַ֙רְתִּי֙ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל

כִּ֥י אִם־אַתָּ֖ה וּבֵ֣ית אָבִ֑יךָ

בַּֽעֲזָבְכֶם֙ אֶת־מִצְוֺ֣ת **יְהוָ֔ה**

וַתֵּ֖לֶךְ אַחֲרֵ֥י הַ**בְּעָלִֽים**׃

19       וְעַתָּ֗ה שְׁלַ֨ח

קְבֹ֥ץ אֵלַ֛י אֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל אֶל־הַ֣ר הַכַּרְמֶ֑ל וְאֶת־נְבִיאֵ֨י הַבַּ֜עַל אַרְבַּ֧ע מֵא֣וֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁ֗ים וּנְבִיאֵ֤י הָֽאֲשֵׁרָה֙ אַרְבַּ֣ע מֵא֔וֹת אֹכְלֵ֖י שֻׁלְחַ֥ן אִיזָֽבֶל׃

20       וַיִּשְׁלַ֥ח אַחְאָ֖ב בְּכָל־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל

וַיִּקְבֹּ֥ץ אֶת־הַנְּבִיאִ֖ים אֶל־הַ֥ר הַכַּרְמֶֽל׃

The A||B|C|B′|C′||A′ pattern of (21b) reveals the dichotomy of the central issue: YHWH's demand for ‘*exclusive covenant loyalty*.’

a21      וַיִּגַּ֨שׁ אֵלִיָּ֜הוּ אֶל־כָּל־הָעָ֗ם

וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙

עַד־מָתַ֞י אַתֶּ֣ם פֹּסְחִים֮ עַל־שְׁתֵּ֣י הַסְּעִפִּים֒

b21      אִם־**יְהוָ֤ה** הָ**ֽאֱלֹהִים֙**

לְכ֣וּ אַחֲרָ֔**יו**

וְאִם־הַ**בַּ֖עַל**

לְכ֣וּ אַחֲרָ֑**יו**

וְלֹֽא־עָנ֥וּ הָעָ֛ם אֹת֖וֹ דָּבָֽר׃

In (23a) the alternating contrast between Elijah/prophets is clarified with instructions given in an alternating, repetitive order. In (24a) we see an alternating, repetitive contrast in Elijah's binary command. And at (24b), the echo of the people's previous response brings the entire section to its conclusion while priming the succeeding narrative plot line of the text.

22       וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֵלִיָּ֙הוּ֙ אֶל־הָעָ֔ם

אֲנִ֞י נוֹתַ֧רְתִּי נָבִ֛יא לַ**יהוָ֖ה** לְבַדִּ֑י

וּנְבִיאֵ֣י הַבַּ֔עַל אַרְבַּע־מֵא֥וֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁ֖ים אִֽישׁ׃

a23       וְיִתְּנוּ־לָ֜נוּ שְׁנַ֣יִם פָּרִ֗ים

וְיִבְחֲר֣וּ לָהֶם֩ הַפָּ֨ר הָאֶחָ֜ד

וִֽינַתְּחֻ֗הוּ

וְיָשִׂ֙ימוּ֙ עַל־הָ֣עֵצִ֔ים

וְאֵ֖שׁ לֹ֣א יָשִׂ֑ימוּ

b23      וַאֲנִ֞י אֶעֱשֶׂ֣ה׀ אֶת־הַפָּ֣ר הָאֶחָ֗ד

וְנָֽתַתִּי֙ עַל־הָ֣עֵצִ֔ים

וְאֵ֖שׁ לֹ֥א אָשִֽׂים׃

a24       וּקְרָאתֶ֞ם בְּשֵׁ֣ם **אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶ֗ם**

וַֽאֲנִי֙ אֶקְרָ֣א בְשֵׁם־**יְהוָ֔ה**

וְהָיָ֧ה הָ**אֱלֹהִ֛ים**

אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲנֶ֥ה בָאֵ֖שׁ

ה֣וּא הָ**אֱלֹהִ֑ים**

b24      וַיַּ֧עַן כָּל־הָעָ֛ם

וַיֹּאמְר֖וּ

ט֥וֹב הַדָּבָֽר׃

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**Excursus on the OT concept of ‘East-ward’** [ChatGPT]

In the Book of Genesis, the concept of "east" often carries *symbolic*, *geographical*, and *theological* significance.

Here are some notable instances:

**1. Garden of Eden** (Genesis 2:8)

* Verse: *“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.”*
* Significance: The east is associated with the Garden of Eden, symbolizing a place of divine presence, beauty, and abundance. Its location in the east may indicate a sacred space where humanity began its relationship with God.

**2.** **Expulsion of Adam and Eve** (Genesis 3:24)

* Verse: *“After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”*
* Significance: The east becomes the direction of separation and exile from God’s presence. The cherubim guarding the east side emphasize humanity's disconnection from Eden after the Fall.

**3. Cain's Exile** (Genesis 4:16)

* Verse: *“So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”*
* Significance: Moving eastward here represents further alienation from God. Cain’s journey symbolizes a move into a life of wandering and estrangement.

**4. Tower of Babel** (Genesis 11:2)

* Verse: *“As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.”*
* Significance: Moving eastward here may imply a progression toward human pride and rebellion, culminating in the construction of the Tower of Babel.

**5. Lot's Choice** (Genesis 13:11)

* Verse: *“So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.”*
* Significance: Lot’s move eastward to Sodom represents a choice driven by materialism and leads to moral and spiritual consequences.

**Theological Implications:**

* *East* as a Place of Separation: In Genesis, moving east often signifies separation from God’s will or presence.
* *East* as a Symbol of New Beginnings: It is also associated with the rising sun, renewal, and hope in later biblical contexts, balancing its portrayal.

In summary, "*east*" in Genesis is a loaded term, representing *physical direction*, *theological significance*, and *narrative symbolism*.

**Excursus on Elijah as Moses *Redivivus*** [ChatGPT]

The concept of **Elijah as Moses *Redivivus*** (Moses *reborn* or *revived*) reflects the strong thematic and theological parallels between the prophet Elijah and Moses, two central figures in Israel’s history. While they are distinct individuals, their lives and ministries are interconnected in ways that suggest Elijah is a kind of continuation or re-embodiment of Moses' prophetic mission.

**Key Parallels Between *Elijah* & *Moses:***

1. **Encounter with God on Mount Horeb/Sinai:**
   * Moses: He ascends Mount Sinai to meet God and receive the law (Exodus 19–20; 34:29-35). God reveals His glory to Moses, passing by while Moses is hidden in the cleft of a rock (Exodus 33:18-23).
   * Elijah: Elijah also encounters God on Mount Horeb (another name for Sinai) after his flight from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:8-18). God reveals Himself to Elijah not in a dramatic display but in a "gentle whisper," echoing Moses' intimate experience of God's presence.
2. **Miraculous Power Over Nature:**
   * Moses: Parts the Red Sea (Exodus 14), brings water from a rock (Exodus 17:6), and calls down plagues in Egypt.
   * Elijah: Parts the Jordan River with his cloak (2 Kings 2:8), prays for drought and rain (1 Kings 17–18), and calls down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-39).
3. **Leadership and Confrontation with Idolatry:**
   * Moses: Confronts Pharaoh and the idolatry of the golden calf (Exodus 32). He calls Israel to exclusive worship of Yahweh.
   * Elijah: Challenges King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, opposing the worship of Baal. On Mount Carmel, he stages a contest to prove Yahweh's supremacy over Baal (1 Kings 18).
4. **40-Day Journeys:**
   * Moses: Spends 40 days and nights fasting on Mount Sinai while receiving the law (Exodus 24:18).
   * Elijah: Travels 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb after being sustained by angelic food (1 Kings 19:8).
5. **Successors:**
   * Moses: Passes leadership to Joshua, who leads Israel into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:9).
   * Elijah: Passes his prophetic mantle to Elisha, who continues his mission with a double portion of his spirit (2 Kings 2:9-15).

**Eschatological & Theological Connections:**

1. **The Transfiguration:**
   * Both Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus during the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). This underscores their joint role in pointing toward the fulfillment of the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) in Jesus.
2. **Role in Jewish Eschatology:**
   * Moses represents the lawgiver, and Elijah the harbinger of the Messiah. Malachi 4:4-6 links Elijah to the "day of the Lord," prophesying his return to turn hearts and prepare the way for God's intervention.
3. **Continuity of Prophetic Mission:**
   * Elijah's actions mirror Moses' leadership, symbolizing the continuity of God's covenant relationship with His people. Just as Moses led Israel through a formative period, Elijah’s ministry calls Israel back to covenant faithfulness.

**Elijah as a New Moses:**

Elijah's life and ministry reflect a reactivation of Moses' prophetic mission but adapted to a new historical and spiritual context. Both figures function as intercessors, leaders, and agents of divine revelation, emphasizing God's faithfulness and justice. Elijah’s identification as Moses *redivivus* also serves as a type, anticipating the ultimate fulfillment of these roles in Jesus Christ, who embodies both the lawgiver and the prophet.

See also:

* Elijah & Elisha
* Elijah & John the Baptist
* Elijah & Jesus

**Excursus on the Connections between Elijah and Jonah** [ChatGPT]

Elijah and Jonah are two prophets in the Old Testament whose ministries reflect unique aspects of God's mission, but they also share several intriguing connections and contrasts. Here’s an exploration of their relationships in terms of themes, missions, and theological significance:

**1. Both Encounter God in Moments of Crisis**

* Elijah:
  + After his dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), Elijah flees in fear of Queen Jezebel. He becomes despondent and prays for death in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:4).
  + God meets Elijah in his despair with grace, providing sustenance and revealing Himself in a "gentle whisper" on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:12-13).
* Jonah:
  + Jonah flees from God's call to preach to Nineveh and ends up in the belly of a great fish. In this dark, near-death situation, Jonah prays, and God delivers him (Jonah 2).
  + God's intervention highlights His patience and mercy, even for reluctant prophets.

**2. Mission to Confront Sin**

* Elijah:
  + Confronts Israel's idolatry and apostasy, particularly under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He calls the people back to covenant faithfulness by challenging Baal worship (1 Kings 18:16-39).
* Jonah:
  + Sent to confront the sin of Nineveh, a foreign and wicked city, calling them to repentance (Jonah 3:4). Jonah’s mission demonstrates God's concern for all nations, not just Israel.

**3. Reluctance in Prophetic Mission**

* Elijah:
  + Though faithful, Elijah grows discouraged, feeling isolated and overwhelmed by his role (1 Kings 19:10). His frustration mirrors the burden of being God’s prophet in a rebellious world.
* Jonah:
  + Jonah outright refuses God's command at first, fleeing to Tarshish instead of obeying (Jonah 1:3). Even after preaching to Nineveh, Jonah is bitter about their repentance and God's mercy (Jonah 4:1-3).

**4. Emphasis on God's Sovereignty and Mercy**

* Elijah:
  + His ministry highlights God’s sovereignty over all creation, particularly in nature (fire from heaven, drought, and rain in 1 Kings 17–18). God also shows mercy by sustaining Elijah and reaffirming his purpose.
* Jonah:
  + Jonah’s story underscores God’s sovereignty in directing nature (the storm, the fish, the plant, and the worm in Jonah 1:4-17 and Jonah 4). It also reveals God’s boundless mercy, even for Gentiles who repent.

**5. Role as a Sign**

* Elijah:
  + Elijah’s prophetic life foreshadows the ministry of John the Baptist and the coming of Jesus. He appears with Moses at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3), symbolizing the fulfillment of the law and prophets.
* Jonah:
  + Jesus explicitly references Jonah as a sign of His death and resurrection, comparing Jonah’s three days in the fish to His three days in the tomb (Matthew 12:39-41, Luke 11:29-32). Jonah’s story becomes a symbol of repentance and redemption for all people.

**6. Universal Mission**

* Elijah:
  + Though focused on Israel, Elijah's encounter with the widow of Zarephath (a Gentile in Sidon, 1 Kings 17:8-16) foreshadows the extension of God's blessings to Gentiles.
* Jonah:
  + Jonah's mission is explicitly to a Gentile city, Nineveh, demonstrating God's concern for all nations. This parallels Elijah's broader, though subtler, interactions with non-Israelites.

**Key Contrasts**

* **Attitude Toward Mission**:
  + Elijah is zealous for God, even in discouragement, while Jonah is reluctant and bitter about God's mercy.
* **Outcome**:
  + Elijah struggles with the limited response of Israel, but Jonah sees a massive repentance in Nineveh — though it frustrates him.
* **Focus**:
  + Elijah's mission highlights covenant renewal within Israel, while Jonah's mission emphasizes God's universal salvation.

**Theological Insights**

* Both Elijah and Jonah show that prophets are human, wrestling with doubts, fears, and frustrations. Yet, God uses them to reveal His character: sovereign, merciful, and just.
* Their stories demonstrate that God's plans are not limited by human frailty, extending His call to repentance to both His chosen people and the nations beyond.

These connections present Elijah and Jonah as complementary figures, one calling Israel back to God and the other showing God's love for the Gentiles, foreshadowing the global scope of the gospel.

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