

**PAUL'S USE OF ELIJAH'S MT. HOREB EXPERIENCE
IN ROM 11:2-6
AN EXEGETICAL NOTE**

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Paul's use of 1 Kgs 19:10-18 in Rom 11:2-6 has an important role in his proof that God has not cast off His people Israel. His main dependence is upon the Massoretic Text rather than the Septuagint. He makes a number of changes in his adaptation of the OT passage, none of which violates the meaning of the OT context. Despite apparent parallels between Elijah and Moses in the OT, the 1 Kings passage does not elevate Elijah to the level of Moses in God's plan. Rather it emphasizes the sovereignty of God at work to preserve a remnant. Paul's theological emphasis in Rom 11:2-6 is upon God's preservation of a remnant of Jews through grace, not human merit. Through this means He guards against the total loss of the people of Israel.

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The prophet Elijah has an important place in both testaments, and has attracted moderate attention from NT scholars.² One of the references to Elijah that has not attracted as much attention (and rightly so) is Paul's reference in Rom 11:2-6 to the pericope involving Elijah on

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²Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 77-88, and the bibliography in these pages.

Mt. Horeb (1 Kgs 19:10-18). Though this NT citation of an OT text is not as theologically problematic as other references to Elijah, it nevertheless has a pivotal position in Paul's argument in Romans 11. It supports his case that God has not cast off His people. It therefore deserves careful attention.

This exegetical note purposes to examine the textual, hermeneutical, exegetical, and theological details of 1 Kgs 19:10, 14, and 18 in their context, and then to determine why Paul used the verses in his *apologia* of Rom 11:2-6 and what the OT verses add to his argument.

TEXTUAL AND HERMENEUTICAL FACTORS

When one examines the MT, LXX, and Paul's citation in Rom 11:3-4, more agreement between Paul's text and the MT is apparent than between either of these and the LXX. Several notable differences between the NT and MT passages occur, however. The following will focus on some hermeneutical implications of these differences.

First, Paul abbreviates 1 Kgs 19:10 and 14 by omitting the MT's mention of Elijah's zeal (קָנָא קִנְנֵי אֵלִיָּהוּ, *qannō qinnēti*, "I have been very zealous"), Israel's rejection of the covenant (עָזְבוּ בְרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל [ʿāzēbū bērtēkā bēnē yiśrāʾēl, "the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant"]),³ the mention of the sword (בְּחֶרֶב, *beherēb*, "with a sword"), and the rather redundant לְקַחְתָּהּ (lēqahitāh, "to take her [Elijah's life]"). Also the phrase וְכָל-פֶּה לֹא-נָשָׂא לוֹ (wēkāl-happeh ʾāšer lō-nāšaq lō, "and every mouth which has not kissed him") in 1 Kgs 19:18 finds no parallel in Paul's citation. With the possible exception of the first omission (Elijah's zeal, *qannō qinnēti*), no significant theological reason for Paul to have shortened these verses is evident. The points to which Paul refers are quite sufficient for his purposes and do not violate the OT sense.

Second, Paul inverts two phrases from 1 Kgs 19:10, 14: הָרֶגְנִי

³It is impossible to say dogmatically why Paul omitted the mention of breaking the covenant. Perhaps he viewed this as a fairly nebulous thing, with the killing of the prophets and destroying of the altars being a more concrete and observable evidence of that breach. But this is speculative.

נְבִיאֵיְכֶם (nēbīʿēkā hārēgā, "they have killed your prophets")—τοὺς προφήτας σου ἀπέκτειναν (tous prophētas sou apekteinan) and מִזְבְּחֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים (mizbēhōtēkā hārāsā, "they have torn down your altar")—τὰ θυσιαστήρια σου κατέσκαψαν (ta thysiastēria sou kateskapsan). H. A. W. Meyer maintains that the inversion is accidental and has no real significance.⁴ Meyer may be correct, but possibly Paul inverted them to de-emphasize the killing of the prophets. Though Paul's situation was always perilous (cf. Rom 8:36), it was not as critical when he wrote Romans as Elijah's was at the time of the pericope. Perhaps his intent was to avoid drawing a parallel between himself and Elijah, and thus he placed the killing of the prophets first. It is impossible to be certain of Paul's motivation on this point, however.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, is the apparent change by Paul of a future-referring Hiph'il perfect first common singular verb וְהִשָּׁרֵתִי (wēhishartī, "I will leave") in 1 Kgs 19:18⁵ to the aorist κατέλιπον⁶ (katelipon, "I have left") in Rom 11:4. The shift may not

⁴H. A. W. Meyer, *A Critical and Exegetical Handbook on the Epistle to the Romans* (1886 6th Funk and Wagnalls ed., Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha, 1979 reprint) 428.

⁵For the future force of the verb, cf. Gerhard Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 1972) 169; Norman H. Snaith, "1 Kings," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1956) 3:164; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 299. Though these writers do not justify their interpretation of a future sense with וְהִשָּׁרֵתִי, the fact that it is a *waw* conversive with an Hiph'il perfect (the *wēqtl* combination; note the *shewa* with the *waw*, the shifting of the *Mērēkhā* accent to *Milra'*, and the *wēqtl* combination following the future-referring [imperfective] Hiph'il imperfect הִשָּׁרֵתִי in 19:18), as well as being found in God's discourse, support their conclusions. Cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 456-58, 527-28.

⁶The NA²⁶ indicates that there is a textual variant with κατέλιπον, most likely due to itacism. The more likely choices are between the imperfect κατέλειπον, which has ancient proto-Alexandrian support (P⁴⁶ A 1739) and support from the Western F and G, and the aorist κατέλιπον, which has equally strong support from Alexandrian (Σ B), Western (D), and Byzantine texts. The problem probably has to be decided on the basis of intrinsic probability, in which case κατέλιπον is the preferred reading. The context argues for a reading which

be as significant as one might suppose. While the sparing of the remnant was probably as yet future, the context of 1 Kings 19 shows that God's decision to spare the 7000 had already been made before the interaction in 19:18 with Elijah and that the 7000 even at that point were being preserved.⁷ Possibly, then, Paul is emphasizing in Romans this antecedent decision by God to preserve some,⁸ and Paul reflects this emphasis with the use of the aorist *katelipon*.⁹ Paul's change of tense

reflects God's selection as a complete action (the aorist aspect; cf. *ἀπόσατο, προέγνω* [11:2]; *ἔκαμψαν* [11:4]), rather than a background process (the aspect of the imperfect tense). In either case, neither the meaning nor the theology is affected much. What is most surprising is that the LXX text, based on Vaticanus, reads *καταλείψεις* (future active, second person singular) in 1 Kgs 19:18, but Vaticanus in Rom 11:4 reads the aorist *κατέλιπον* (first person singular). More on this point will follow below.

⁷If God's decision had not as yet been made, then 19:18 would hardly function as either an encouragement for or a reproof of Elijah. God corrects Elijah's statement that Elijah was the only one to God among the entire people. If in fact the 7000 were not already alive and in the process of being preserved, Elijah's statement would be accurate, not in need of revision, and thus would not have evoked God's correction.

⁸C. E. B. Cranfield apparently hints at this interpretation when he says, "Paul writes the first person [*κατέλιπον*], adds *ἐμαυτῶ*, and uses the aorist tense, referring the words to the divine decision" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979] 2:546, emphasis added).

⁹Regardless how one resolves this problem, a more intriguing one exists when considering the reading of the LXX, which has the *second* person singular verb as distinguished from the MT's first common singular or Paul's first person. The Vorlage of A and B apparently read $\Gamma\ \bar{\iota}\ \bar{\iota}\ \bar{\alpha}\ \bar{\omega}\ \bar{\iota}\ \bar{\iota}$ (pointed $\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}$ -), not having the final *yod* found in the MT. The Syro-Hexapla (according to James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Books of Kings* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951] 318) and Origen (cf. Fridericus Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum* [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964] 1:636) also have a second person reading, supporting *καταλείψεις*, while the Lucianic Greek reading is *καταλείψω* (Montgomery, *Kings* 318). Perhaps a consideration of the context can account for the second person reading. It may be that the 7000 of 1 Kgs 19:18 were seen as essentially the same group as the 7000 of 1 Kgs 20:15 (LXX 21:15). If this is true, perhaps part of the text history reflects an interpretation in which Elijah had a hand in the preservation of that 7000 under Ahab (cf. the unnamed prophet, usually identified as Micaiah, in 1 Kgs 20:13 ff., 22 ff., etc.). But the

is not completely *ad hoc* if this interpretation is correct.

Fourth, Paul makes one notable addition to the OT texts, an addition not reflected either in the LXX or the MT. In Rom 11:4 he adds the first person reflexive pronoun ἐμαυτῶ (*emautō*, "for myself"). By adding this word Paul does not do great violence to the OT meaning of the passage. In the context of 1 Kings 20 where the figure 7000¹⁰ occurs again in reference to the soldiers under Ahab in his fight against Ben-hadad, it is evident that God intended to preserve the 7000 soldiers at least in part for His own sake—so that Ahab would revere the true God (20:13, 28). Hence Paul's use of *emautō*, along with the other variations from the MT, does no violence to the OT meaning of the text.

EXEGETICAL FACTORS

Two primary procedures appear to have guided the formation of 1 Kgs 19:10, 14, 18. One is inter-textual and the other is inner-textual. Both contribute to Paul's reading and use of this OT text in his epistle.

Several scholars draw attention to the remarkable parallels between Elijah's experience at Mt. Horeb and Moses' experiences.¹¹

reading of the first person by the MT and Paul fits better with the strong contextual emphasis in 1 Kings on God's decision to preserve a remnant apart from human agency, in this case, apart from Elijah's participation.

¹⁰The 7000 of 1 Kgs 19:18 has been viewed traditionally by Rashi (cf. C. F. Keil, *I & II Kings* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 reprint] 263-64) and by Yarchi (presumably Yarchi, *aka* Rabbi Abraham Ben-Nathan; cf. Otto Thenius, *Die Bücher der Könige* [Leipzig: Weidmansche Buchhandlung, 1849] 236) as the same group of 7000 found in 1 Kgs 20:15. It is doubtful that this is the case, though as Keil (264) points out, "The sameness in the numbers is apparently not accidental. . . ." It is possible that while the two groups were distinct in the mind of the author of 1 Kings, he nevertheless mentioned the same size of the two groups in order to emphasize God's ability and intention to preserve such a group. That God would spare 7000 in 1 Kings 19 is observable in His miraculous and gracious sparing of a different 7000 in 1 Kings 20.

¹¹Some of the parallels are as follows: While Moses passed 40 days on Mt. Horeb (Exod 34:28), Elijah took 40 days to get there (1 Kgs 19:8); Elijah is in קַוֵּי־רֶכֶת ("the cave"—note the article), probably an allusion to the location in which Moses found himself in Exod 33:22; God is said to "pass by" both Moses (Exod

Despite these parallels, the writer of 1 Kings probably shows a fundamental disparity between the two individuals, not a correlation. In the exposure he had to God, Moses received encouragement for his work,¹² but according to Robert L. Cohn the interaction of Elijah and God was essentially a decommissioning of Elijah as a prophet.¹³ William J. Dumbrell maintains that Elijah did not learn anything in the theophany he experienced, nor was any information communicated to him in the "still, small sound." Elijah was an "accuser of the brethren" rather than an intercessor on behalf of the people as Moses was. Dumbrell suggests that through these differences the author is indicating that Elijah was *not* a new Moses, and that God was not beginning a radically new movement through him. All of this tends to emphasize the point made overtly in 1 Kgs 19:18, namely, that God Himself would preserve a faithful remnant

33:22, עֲבָרִי, גִּיעֹבֵר, and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:11, עֲבָרִי), and both receive a vision of God (for Moses, see Exodus 34; for Elijah, see 1 Kgs 19:11-13). Furthermore, like Moses, Elijah contended on behalf of God against apostates, called for a decision to follow God, and went to Horeb for reassurance. Elijah's theophany shared with the theophany given to Moses and Israel the elements of wind, earthquake, and fire (cf. Exod 19:9; 20:18-19; Deut 4:9-10; 5:24-25). For a discussion of these parallels, cf. Klaus Seybold, "Elia am Gottesberg: Vorstellungen prophetischen Wirkens nach 1. Könige 19," *Evangelische Theologie* 33 (1973):10-11; William J. Dumbrell, "What Are You Doing Here? Elijah At Horeb," *Crux* 22 (1986):15-17; Brevard Childs, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives," *Interpretation* 34 (1980):134-35; Robert L. Cohn, "The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19," *JBL* 101 (1982):341-42.

¹²Cf. Exodus 6; 19:1-25; 32:7-17; 33:12-23, etc.

¹³Cohn, "Logic" 342-43. Contra A. Sanda, *Die Bücher der Könige* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911) 452; Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha: As Polemics Against Baal Worship*, Pretoria Oriental Series, ed. A. Van Selms (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968) 26-27; and Burke O. Long, *1 Kings: With an Introduction to Historical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 200. Bronner and Long argue from the parallels with Moses and God's appearance to Elijah that this is to be viewed by the reader as a re-commissioning of the prophet. They fail to consider the fairly negative nature of the interaction between Elijah and God. But Cohn may go too far in his evaluation. If God were as displeased as Cohn maintains, it would be hard to reconcile that displeasure with His provision of food (1 Kgs 19:5-8) and with His theophany. Perhaps it is preferable to say that God was showing Elijah that the significant part of his ministry was over; but this is not the same as Elijah being "fired."

that would not worship Baal, and that He would do this sovereignly and graciously apart from any significant involvement by Elijah.¹⁴ Dumbrell writes,

Israel's future did not depend upon the manifestation of his [Elijah's] particular genius of giftedness. It depended as it always did and would upon the sovereign intervention of Yahweh, who would continue to honour his commitment made at Sinai to Israel, through the instruments and circumstances which he from time to time would choose. . . .¹⁵

In essence, then, Elijah would not enjoy the prominence in God's plans that Moses did.¹⁶ The differences between Elijah and Moses support the concept of the sovereignty of God to work as He sees fit in the preservation of a remnant apart from human participation. Other factors within the passage itself also point in this direction.¹⁷

¹⁴Dumbrell, "Elijah" 15-18. Cf. also R. A. Carlson, "Élie à L'Horeb," *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969):438-39.

¹⁵Dumbrell, "Elijah" 18-19. Cf. also Gene Rice, *Nations Under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 163, who writes, "At Horeb Elijah learns . . . that despite appearances to the contrary, God is in control, . . . that God's timetable may differ from ours, and that the final victory may rest with a future generation and with other leaders God has already chosen."

¹⁶Cohn ("Logic" 347) maintains also that the miracles Elijah experienced emphasize God's sovereignty and increased participation in the affairs of His people. In 1 Kgs 17:22, God acted indirectly through Elijah to restore life to the widow's son; in 18:38, God acts more visibly on behalf of Elijah; and in 19:12 ff., the theophany is an even more direct display of God's power. Thus the author presents God's intervention as increasingly more direct, even to the point of Elijah becoming virtually unnecessary.

¹⁷There are other points in 1 Kgs 19:10-18 worth consideration. Brevard Childs and Gene Rice rightly maintain that the repetition of the questions God asked of Elijah in 19:9 and 13 were reproofs rather than a request for information (Brevard Childs, "On Reading the Elijah narratives," *Interpretation* 34 [1980]:134-35; Rice, *Nations Under God* 158-59). Elijah's response(s) in 19:10 and 14 to God's questions are also informative. The first words of Elijah's responses were *אני אהיה אלהים*, which Simon J. DeVries translates as "I have been furiously zealous for Yahweh"

Inner-textual factors also influenced the formation and meaning of 1 Kings 19, the main one being the point mentioned above, the presence of the figure 7000 in chapters 19 and 20.¹⁸ Though Cohn maintains rightly that 1 Kings 17-19 is "an example of a carefully woven literary tissue . . .," he also maintains wrongly that 1 Kings 20 is ". . . an unrelated war story."¹⁹ Chapter 20 *does* appear to be unconnected with what precedes. However, the promise God made to Ahab that he would be victorious over an enormously superior foe in Ben-hadad suggests literary, theological, and exegetical connections with 1 Kings 19. The most important of these connections is God's gracious preservation of the 7000 soldiers *even though they did not merit God's preservation*. Ahab did not deserve the protection he received from God. This inner-textual factor (the preservation of 7000) may have played an important role in Paul's use of the pericope in Romans 11.

THEOLOGICAL FACTORS

In light of the textual, hermeneutical, and exegetical considerations reviewed above, three theological observations emerge. First, Paul's main point in Rom 11:2-6 is that God was preserving a remnant of Jews, just as He had in 1 Kings. The two situations are analogous (οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ . . . [*houtōs oun kai en tō nyn kairō* . . ., "therefore so also in the present time," Rom 11:5]).

Second, He accomplishes this preservation *κατ' ἐκλογὴν*

(1 Kings, in vol. 12 of *Word Biblical Commentary* [Waco: Word, 1985] 237). The infinitive absolute frequently carries a strongly emphatic force, as Ronald J. Williams maintains [*Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976) 37-38]. Alan J. Hauser and Russel Gregory maintain that Elijah's statement in 19:14 (וְאֵין עִמָּךְ אֲנִי וְאַתָּה בְּלֻדְהָא, "and I alone am left") suggests that Elijah had an over-inflated view of himself and his role in the fight against Baal, as if he were indispensable (*From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis* [Sheffield: The Almond, 1990] 75). Each of these points emphasizes God's sovereignty in the preservation of a remnant.

¹⁸Cf. 00-00, and esp. n. 11, 00.

¹⁹Cohn, "Logic" 334.

χάριτος (*kat' eklogēn charitos*, "according to the election of grace," 11:5) and χάριτι, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἔργων (*chariti, ouketi ex ergōn*, "through grace, not from works," 11:6). This preservation of a remnant in Paul's day fits precisely with the preservation revealed in 1 Kgs 19:18, and observed in 1 Kgs 20:15, where the preservation is entirely through God's sovereign intervention and grace apart from all human merit (since Ahab had none).

Third, some NT scholars maintain that in Rom 11:1-6 the whole nation is in view. The entirety (πᾶς Ἰσραήλ [*pas Israēl*, "all Israel"], 11:26) will be saved in the end.²⁰ But in Romans, as in 1 Kings, the point Paul makes is that the Jews as a people would be *completely lost* apart from the gracious, sovereign intervention of God.²¹ In 1 Kings, the people were lost in Baalism and thus, without God's intervention, lost in the ensuing judgment of God. In Romans 11 also, the people were lost. God preserves a remnant, guarding against the total loss of the people.²²

²⁰Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, "Zur Interpretation von Römer 11:25-32," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Walter Wolff (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971) 557; Johannes Munck, *Christ & Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9-11* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 136; Käsemann, *Romans*, 300; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:547; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 2:68; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC (Dallas: Word 1988) 681.

²¹I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere that πᾶς Ἰσραήλ in Rom 11:26 does not necessarily refer to the nation as a whole (Michael G. Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25-27 and the Future of Israel in Paul's Thought," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3 [1992]:141-74, esp. 158-64). The many uses of the phrase in the LXX support the idea that πᾶς Ἰσραήλ refers only to whatever group of Jews is in the immediate context where the phrase occurs, and usually does not refer to the nation as a whole.

²²Cf. Hasel, *Remnant* 171-73; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 399; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1991) 194.

CONCLUSION

Paul's use of the Elijah-Horeb pericope in Romans 11 demonstrates his careful reading of the OT (probably the Hebrew *viz-a-viz* the LXX). His use of the OT passage in no way wrests it from its narrative and theological milieu. In applying it to his current situation, Paul shows that there is a very close analogy between his own situation and Elijah's. Some were questioning the validity of Paul's gospel in light of the almost wholesale rejection of it by the Jews. By the use of 1 Kings 19, Paul demonstrates that in fact God's plans for the Jews had not failed. He had not rejected His people. On the contrary, the gracious preservation of a (small) remnant had been squarely within God's sovereign plan throughout history, as seen conspicuously in the statement God made to Elijah on Mt. Horeb.



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