

What Are You Doing Here?

Part II

24 - Living the Simple Gospel: Philippians
Church on the Park I Sunday, 18 June 2017

Text: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure...But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me” (Phil. 1:12-13, 17-18). Also, 1 Kings 19 - Elijah after Mount Carmel.

Theme: Don't let your emotions get in the way of obeying God and living out your purpose.

Intro: Last week we began to talk about Elijah's experience after the fire fell. It was after the fire fell that the fight was on. Elijah was spiritually, emotionally and physically spent. And now he wants to give up on everything—his call to be prophet and life itself. He had enough. But God turned his running away into a pilgrimage. He ended up at the same cave that Moses received his revelation of God. Moses revelation was all about who God is, but Elijah's encounter is about who Elijah is. Elijah has purpose even though he feels powerless. This week we will continue the vowels of a vibrant life. Do you remember the first three in our vowel illustration?

How can you keep vibrant and rejoicing? The **Vowels of a Vibrant Life: AEIOU**

A - Arise, E - Eat, I - Interact

Today, we will focus on the last two vowels: O - Obey & U - Understand Your Purpose

1) O - Obey (1 Kings 17:1-5; 19:9-11)

- Elijah's life was **characterized** by **obedience**.
- True **power** in God comes only from **obedience**.
 - God's power follows the **cord** of **obedience**. God's power **flows** through the **circuitry** of **obedience**. Every other kind of power will **short circuit** your life.
- Elijah had great power. *But how did he receive this power?* He said, “Before whom I **stand**” (1 Kings 17:1). You see God's speaks to and works through those who have a **posture** of **servanthood**.
 - And the key thing about servants of God is that they **obey**.
- “So he **went** and did **according** to the **word** of the Lord...” (1 Kings 17:5). Though it was **costly**, though it meant isolation, he obeyed.
- Elijah was characterized by obedience, but here we see one of the **greatest obstacles** to obedience.
 - Your **emotions** and **feelings** is one of the greatest obstacles to obeying God.
 - You are **not** called to **feel** and then **obey**. But to **obey**.
 - **Feelings follow** the **locomotive** of **obedience**, not the other way around.
 - If **feelings** are your **engine**, you will **derail**.
- At this point, Elijah's **emotions are taking over**, so God is awakening him to his purpose: “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” [Ma-Leka Poh Eliyahu]

- It is through **obedience** that you are **refreshed** and **empowered** in God.
- Jesus said, “My **food** is to do the will of him who **sent** me and **finish** his work” (John 4:34).
- The **will of God feeds** and **strengthens** you.
- In our main passage today, **Paul** longs for God’s people to **obey God** even when he is **absent**.
 - Be faithful even when the leader is absent. Obey **for God** and not **for man**.
 - *Why is this so important?*
 - God’s people are not people of the **flesh**, but of the **Spirit**
 - After the law was given, **Moses** was away for forty days.
 - During that time, the people fell in **idolatry**.
 - *Why?* They felt **neglected**. They were **impatient** and they were living according to the **flesh** rather than the Spirit.
- This brings us to an important point: there are **two kinds of obedience**: 1) obedience in the **flesh**, 2) obedience by the **Spirit**.
 - The first one is an **outward form** of obedience—it’s not from the **heart** or done through **God’s power**.
 - This is a **pretend obedience** (*Psalm 81:15). It’s an obedience out of **fear of punishment**. It can also be sincere but lack knowledge.
 - The other obedience is **Christ’s obedience through you**. It’s from the **heart** and by the **power** of the Holy Spirit.
 - We can also describe it as **legalistic obedience** and **relational obedience**. Many Christians are still in the realm of the **legal**, rather than the **relational**.
 - Paul says, “It is God who is at work **in** you, both to will [θέλω, desire] and to work [ἐνεργέω] for His good pleasure”
- **To sum up, obedience** brings **vibrancy** and **renewal** to your spirit, soul and body. *Why?* Because God created you to do his will. **God’s** whole **interaction** with **Elijah** at Mount Horeb was to **awaken** him to **obey**.

2) U - Understand your Purpose (1 Kings 19:11-19).

- It’s through **interacting** with God’s presence and obedience that you **discover your purpose**.
 - Your purpose is **not fully understood** when you are an **infant** in Christ.
 - Instead, you understand who God has created you to be as you let **God work inside you**.
- Elijah had to go **through** the **storm**—earth-shattering wind, an earthquake and a blazing fire—before **hearing** and **understanding** his **purpose**.
 - The storm **prepares** Elijah for the **voice**. In the same way, fire, wind and earthquake, come before new life. Think about how **Aboriginals** set the land on fire to foster new growth.
- This brings us to the “**still small voice**” a **very rare phrase** in the **Hebrew** and open to interpretation.
 - **qol demamah daqqah** [קול דממה דקה]
 - *qol* - primarily a sound produced by the **vocal cords** (actual or figurative). “God’s qol is the roar of thunder...Finally, it is the sound of the trumpet which Moses heard at Sinai.” The idea is God’s voice is speaking to Elijah. It may not be a audible voice, but a voice spoken to his heart.
 - *demamah* - silent, quiet, whisper, **calm**, stillness, gentle. The idea is that of calming a storm (Psalm 107:29). There was an **inner storm** going on in Elijah that could only be calmed by the Lord’s voice.

- *daqqa* - **thin**, small, fine. From, **crush**, grind, break in pieces; used alongside 'threshing'; grinding grain to make bread. In Exodus 16:4 it is used to describe manna, called 'thin' or 'fine flakes' that look like 'frost.' It's also used for the **ground incense** in the tabernacle. Also, used today for **dukkah** (from Arabic), the grounded spice and nut mix.
- Here's how we can **translate** it: 'a **calming and delicate voice**' or 'a **calming and crushing voice**' or 'a **whisper**' 'a voice that is both **quiet** and **arresting**' 'a sound both **gentle** and **thunderous**.' 'a **sound** both **still** and **striking**' 'a **subtle** and **strong voice**'.
- Here's the point: Elijah's **healing** and recommissioning happening through **God's powerful voice**. It brought him **back** to his **senses** and **mission**. It **awakened** him from his **grief** and **self-focus**. It lifted him out of his **feelings** and **back to God's work**.
- His purpose was to **prepare** the **way for the Lord**, and specifically to raise up the **next generation**. To make disciples through Elisha.
- "What are you doing here, Elijah?" That's a question of **purpose**.
 - *What is your purpose?* To **sum** it up, you are called to **anoint** and raise up the **next generation**. It's exactly what Jesus said at the end of his ministry: "**Make disciples**."
 - At this point Elijah find Elisha and takes him 'under his wings'.
- God was saying to Elijah: "**Return to your walk**, what I have **called** you to do. **Don't stop** and get **stuck** here. Get **back** and **pour** yourself into **Elisha**. You **feel depleted**, but you still have a **purpose**. My Kingdom must continue and Ahab's kingdom will not last long. You are called to be a **revolutionary**. Soon **Ahab** and **Jezebel** will be **dead**, but you must continue to follow me and do my work. Don't let this **setback** cause you to **stop**."
- "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to **observe/obey** [τερέω, to guard, treasure, watch, obey] all the I **commanded** you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20).

END NOTES

Go/Walk (1 Kings 19:15)

- 498 הָלַךְ (*hālak*) **go, walk**. ASV and RSV similar with the latter sometimes improving on the former.

Derivatives

- 498a הֹלֵךְ (*hēlek*) **traveler**.
498b הָלִיךְ (*hālîk*) **step**.
498c הַלִּיכָה (*hălîkā*) **going, way, traveling company**.
498d מַהֲלָךְ (*mahălak*) **walk, journey**.
498e תַּהֲלוּכָה (*tahălûkā*) **procession**.

Our word denotes movement in general, although usually of people. Hence, it can be applied with various connotations (including Josh 17:7), and in various contexts. Especially, we ought to notice the imperative ejaculatory use (Gen 37:13, 20; Gen 19:32; 31:44), the use of the infinitive to extend the action of another verb (Gen 8:3, 5; see GKC, 113u), and the use of the finite to concretize the action of another verb (Gen 27:14; 50:18; II Kgs 3:7; Isa 2:3). Synonyms are: *rûṣ* “run,” *bô* “come, enter,” *yāšā* “go out,” *ālâ* “ascend,” and *šûb* “return.” Its antonyms are: *yāšab* “sit,” and *āmad* “stand.” Our root occurs 1562 times. It is a common Semitic root (Akkadian *alāku*, CAD. A.I, pp. 300–28; Ugaritic *hlk*, UT 19: no. 766).

The specific application of this verb to various kinds of going may be translated variously: e.g., the “creeping” of a snake (Gen 3:14), the “prowling” of foxes (Lam 5:18), the “sailing” of ships (Gen 7:18), the “flowing” of water (Gen 2:14), the “llaying” of trumpets (Ex 19:19), the “walking” of men (Ex 14:29), etc. In another special use this verb signifies the end of, e.g. rain (Song 2:11), dew (Hos 6:4), wind (Ps 78:39), grief (Job 16:6), human life (Gen 15:2; Josh 23:14), etc.

This verb can be applied both to supposed gods (Ps 115:7) and to the Lord God. Although other verbs are generally used in theophanic accounts (Frank Schnutenhaus, “*Das Kommen und Erscheinen im Alten Testament*,” ZAW 76:1–22) there is at least one clear use of *hālak* in such a context (Gen 18:33). Perhaps Gen 3:8 is also a theophanic context, although the participle may go with *qôl* rather than with “Lord God,” in which case the translation would be “the voice of the Lord God which was going through the garden on the wind of the day.” Conceived anthropomorphically, God walks on the clouds (Ps 104:3) or in the heavens (Job 22:14). More frequently, and more importantly *hālak* is applied to Yahweh’s coming to his people in judgment or blessing (II Sam 7:23; Ps 80:2 [H 3]), especially during the wilderness wanderings (e.g. Ex 33:14; 13:21). In this latter context, note the new Exodus (Isa 45:2). As the people followed the ark of God through the desert so they followed it in ritual (infrequently expressed by *hālak*; cf. Josh 3:6; Num 10:32–36).

Apostasy is described as their “going after” other/false gods (Ex 32:1; Jer 5:23), pursuing one’s own evil counsel (Jer 7:24; Ps 1:1), or heart (Jer 11:8), or walking in darkness (Isa 9:2 [H 1]), and meets with God’s judgment (Lev 26:24). The truly pious follow God’s leading in all that they do (i.e., they keep his commandments, I Kgs 3:14; Ps 119:1ff.). This idea can be expressed by *hālāk*; alone (without *’aḥārē*) plus words such as *šēdāqôt* (Isa 33:15), etc. The Hithpael is used in this connection to emphasize the continuity of the action. Striking examples of men who so lived before God are Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc. (Gen 5:22; 6:9; 17:1).

הָלִיכָה (*hālîkā*). **Goings, doings, procession, travelers.** ASV and RSV translate variously with the latter giving superior renderings. This noun (GKC 84^{a1}) concretizes various connotations of the verb whether conceived as the process of going (Ps 68:24 [H 25]; Nah 2:5 [H 6]; Hab 3:6; Ugaritic *hlk. kbkbm*: Albright, BASOR 82:49), or the process of life (Prov 31:27), or the thing that goes (Job 6:19). For cognates see Akkadian *alaktu* (CAD A.I., pp. 297–300). Our word occurs six times.

תַּהֲלֻכָה (*tahālûkā*). **Procession.** ASV and RSV the same. This *hapa legomenon* (GKC 85r) concretizes the formal ritualistic “going.”

Bibliography: Blank, Sheldon H., “Some Considerations Concerning Biblical Prayer,” HUCA 32:75–90. Speiser, E. A., “The Durative *Hithpacel*: A Tan-Form,” JAOS 75:118–21. THAT, I, pp. 486–92,

L.J.C.

Go Back/Turn/Repent (1 Kings 19:15)

2340 שׁוּב (*šûb*) **(re)turn.**

Derivatives

2340a שׁוּבָה (*šûbâ*) **retirement, withdrawal** (Isa 30:15).

2340b שׁוּבָה (*šîbâ*) **restoration** (Ps 126:1).

2340c שׁוּבָב (*šôbāb*) **backsliding.**

2340d שׁוּבָב (*šôbēb*) **backsliding.**

2340e מְשׁוּבָה (*měšûbâ*) **backsliding.**

2340f תְּשׁוּבָה (*těšûbâ*) **answer.**

We have cited simply the basic meaning of *šûb* but as we shall see the verb branches into not a few different nuances. It is the twelfth most frequently used verb in the OT, appearing just over 1050 times. With very few exceptions *šûb* is restricted to the Qal and Hiphil stems. It appears most often in Jeremiah (111 times) followed by Psalms (seventy-one times), Genesis (sixty-eight times), Ezekiel (sixty-two times), I Kings (sixty-two times), II Chronicles (sixtyone times), II Kings (fifty-five times), Isaiah (fifty-one times).

The Bible is rich in idioms describing man's responsibility in the process of repentance. Such phrases would include the following: "incline your heart unto the Lord your God" (Josh 24:23); "circumcise yourselves to the Lord" (Jer 4:4); "wash your heart from wickedness" (Jer 4:14); "break up your fallow ground" (Hos 10:12) and so forth. All these expressions of man's penitential activity, however, are subsumed and summarized by this one verb *šûb*. For better than any other verb it combines in itself the two requisites of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good.

In the Qal stem it has been suggested that there are ten different meanings for *šûb* with subdivisions within each, plus a few uses difficult to pinpoint (Holladay, p. 59ff.). Of these two or three merit special observance. To begin with, the basic meaning of *šûb* "to (re)turn" implying physical motion or movement appears over 270 times. A few times God is the subject, "At the appointed time I will return to you (Sarah)," (Gen 18:14). Most often the subject is a person: "I (Abraham) and the lad (Isaac) will go yonder and worship, and return to you" (Gen 22:5). In the Hiphil there are eighty-seven occurrences of *šûb* in the sense of "bring back, carry back."

Second, often (over 120 times) *šûb* acts as a sort of an auxiliary verb whose function is to repeat the action of the second verb: "and 'again' Isaac dug the wells (*wayyāšōb yiṣḥāq wayyahpōr*," Gen 26:18).

The third important use of *šûb* in the Qal, and theologically the most crucial, is in passages dealing with the covenant community's return to God (in the sense of repentance), or turning away from evil (in the sense of renouncing and disowning sin), or turning away from God (in the sense of becoming apostate). In such contexts *šûb* in the Qal is used 129 times. By contrast, in the Hiphil *šûb* is used only eleven times when discussing the divine-human relationship. "turn back (Qal imperative) and 'let yourself be turned from your idols' (Hiphil) from your idols" (Ezk 14:6).

Taking all stems into consideration, Holladay (p. 117) concludes that there are a total of 164 uses of *šûb* in a covenantal context. The majority of them, as one might expect, are to be found in the classical/literary prophets 113 times, with Jeremiah leading the way (forty-eight times). By way of contrast with Jeremiah, the covenantal usage of *šûb* is found only six times in the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah (maybe only five if we read 30:15 not, "in returning (to God) and rest shall you be saved," but "in sitting still *yāšab*, i.e. abstention from foreign alliances, resting shall you be saved"). In the remaining twenty-seven chapters it is found only four times: 44:22; 55:7; 57:17; 59:20. Thus, we encounter the interesting phenomenon of two prophets back to back in the canon, the first virtually silent on the subject and the second quite vocal. Perhaps the paucity of references in Isaiah is the prophet's way of saying the die has already been cast. Quite poignantly God says to Isaiah, "Make the heart of this people fat ... lest they be converted (*šûb*) and healed." A point of no return has been reached. God has foreseen the stubbornness of his people and has incorporated it into his plan. The prophet, therefore, is not to be frustrated (Mt 13:13ff.).

It should be noted that in a number of places *šûb* means "to return from exile." In the Qal: naturally in Ezr and Neh (Ezr 2:1; Neh 7:6); also Isa 10:22; Jer 22:10; Zech 10:9, *inter alia*; in the Hiphil: I Kgs 8:34; Jer 12:15, *inter alia*. The association between the ideas of a return from exile and a return to the covenant should be obvious. A return

from exile was reclamation as much as a return from any form of sin. That God should permit either return is corroborative of his covenantal faithfulness.

To be sure, there is no systematic spelling out of the doctrine of repentance in the OT. It is illustrated (Ps 51) more than anything else. Yet the fact that people are called “to turn” either “to” or “away from” implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain, but by turning, a God-given power, a sinner can redirect his destiny. There are two sides in understanding conversion, the free sovereign act of God’s mercy and man’s going beyond contrition and sorrow to a conscious decision of turning to God. The latter includes repudiation of all sin and affirmation of God’s total will for one’s life.

שׁוּבָה (*šibâ*). **Restoration, returning.** Used only in Ps 126:1, “When the Lord returns ‘the returning’ of Zion.”

An older view is that *šibat* of Ps 126:1 should be read *šēbît* (BDB p. 986) and the phrase should be translated “turned again the captivity” (so av). This has therefore been called a post-exilic Ps! Dahood (Psalms III, AB, p. 218) agrees with the view adopted here that *šibâ* is in fact from *šûb*. He offers the translation “restore the fortunes of” citing the Sefire inscription in support. He treats the word *šēbût* of vs. 4 also as from *šûb*, offering a similar translation. This view, now widely adopted, makes it unnecessary to see in this phrase a mark of exilic literature (see *šābâ*).

שׁוֹבֵב (*šôbāb*). **Backsliding, apostate.** Appears three times, Jer 3:14, 22 and Isa 57:17, where KJV translates “frowardly,” and Job “like a thief.”

שׁוֹבֵב (*šôbēb*). **Backsliding,** Jer 31:22; 49:4 and a somewhat problematic usage in Mic 2:4 where the versions differ considerably from each other, and several emend (jb).

מְשׁוּבָה (*měšûbâ*). **Backsliding, disloyalty, faithlessness.** This noun appears twelve times, nine of which are in Jeremiah (3:6, 8, 11, etc.). Twice it appears in Hosea: 11:7 (where “backsliding” has become a way of life) and 14:4 [H 5] which indicates that Israel may still be cured from such a lamentable condition. Only in Prov 1:3’ is *měšûbâ* applied to an individual, “The ‘turning away/error’ of the simple shall slay them.”

תְּשׁוּבָה (*těšûbâ*). **Answer, (re-)turn.** Appears eight times, five times in reference to the spring as the “turn” of the year (II Sam 11:1; I Kgs 20:22, 26; I Chr 20:1; II Chr 36:10); once “return” to a place (I Sam 7:17), and twice in the sense of “answer, retort” (Job 21:34; 34:36).

Bibliography: Dahood, M., “Some Ambiguous Texts in Isaias,” CBQ 20:41–43. Gordis, R., “Some Hitherto Unrecognized Meanings of the Verb Shub,” JBL 52: 153–62. Holladay, W., *The Root Shub in the Old Testament*, Leiden: Brill, 1958. Levine, B., “Notes on a Hebrew Ostrakon from Arad,” IEQ 19:49–51. Milgrom, J., “Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?” VT 14:164–82, esp. pp. 169–72. TDNT, IV, pp. 984–99; VII, pp. 723–26. THAT, II, pp. 884–90.

V.P.H.

“In your place” (1 Kings 19:16)

The word used for Elisha ‘replacing’ Elijah (1 Kings 19:6)

2504 תַּחַת (*taḥat*) **beneath, instead of, as, for, for the sake of, flat** (Josh 6:5),
unto, where, whereas.

Derivatives

2504a תַּחְתּוֹן (*taḥtôn*) **lower, nether.**

2504b תַּחֲתִי (*taḥtî*), תַּחֲתִית (*taḥtîṭ*) **low.**

Although “beneath, instead of, in exchange for” would seem to be the basic meanings of *taḥat* (which is used adverbially and prepositionally), its range has been broadened by recent research; see, e.g., J. A. Fitzmyer in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 81:190, and especially J. C. Greenfield in ZAW 73:226–28. When it is combined or compounded with other particles, its meanings are rarely affected to any extent.

The word *taat* is attested almost five hundred times in the OT and appears in numerous theologically significant contexts. The phrase “under the sun” wends its doleful way through the book of Eccl and has become common parlance in our own skeptical age, especially in the expression “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9 RSV). The phrase itself seems to signify simply “on this earth” (see especially 7:20; 8:16; 11:2) and perhaps underscores the frequently nonreligious emphasis of the author of Eccl who both describes the apparent futility of life and yet lives by faith in it (see further J. Gammie in JBL 93 (1974), p. 363). “Under the tongue” is a place where something is held temporarily to be released when desired, e.g. sweetness (Song 4:11), evil (Job 20:12; Ps 10:7), or praise (Ps 66:17 in *The Amplified Bible* and marg. of ASV). Although God has given man dominion over everything on earth and has put all things “under his feet” (Ps 8:6 [H 7], quoted in Heb 2:8), ultimate dominion, highlighted by the same expression, belongs to Jesus Christ (I Cor 15:25, 27; Eph 1:22). Thus “under” by itself can mean “under the authority of,” as of a wife under the authority of her husband (Num 5:19–20, 29; Ezk 23:5; cf. similarly the use of *hypandros*, literally “under a man,” in Rom 7:2). Likewise, “under the hand of” often means “under the authority/control of,” as in Gen 41:35; Jud 3:30; Isa 3:6. But *taḥat* can also be used to express the idea of support and stability, as, e.g., in the widely-quoted and well-loved phrase from the Blessing of Moses: “Underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut 33:27).

taat in the sense of “in exchange for” finds widespread usage in the OT *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation, best known in the “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” phraseology of Ex 21:24 and Lev 24:20 (the same expression occurs in Deut 19:21, but there the preposition is *bē*). Far from being cruel and vengeful, the *lex talionis* was doubtless intended to insure that no more than a just and appropriate penalty would be exacted for crimes committed, whether accidentally or with malice aforethought, in an otherwise relatively cruel age. See further Harris, R. L., “Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible,” Zondervan, 1969, p. 51–52.

taḥat frequently means “instead of,” as, e.g., when a man succeeds to the throne of a dead monarch and is then said to rule “instead of” him (I Kgs 11:43 and often). In this sense *taḥat* is also used in a passage prefiguring substitutionary atonement where

Abraham is pictured as sacrificing a ram as a burnt offering “in the stead of his son” (Gen 22:13). The willingness of Abraham to offer Isaac, if necessary, made a deep impression on Paul, who saw in it the willingness of a greater Father to offer up a greater Son (cf. Gen 22:12, 16 with Rom 8:32).

תַּחְתִּי (*taḥtî*). **Low, lower, lowest, nether.** The derivative *taḥtî* is used twenty times. About a third of these occurrences describe literal situations—the lower story of the ark, the lower springs of Caleb (Jud 1:15), the lower millstone (Job 41:24 [H 16]) etc. The other cases are used metaphorically to qualify the terms “the pit,” “the earth,” or “sheol” (q.v.). In Isa 44:23 the “earth beneath” is merely the earth in contrast to the heavens above (cf. NIV). But in most of the cases of the usage with *’ereṣ* (six times in Ezk, twice elsewhere) the reference is to the place of those who have died. Much discussion revolves around this usage and what it involves. One view equates the “earth below” with “the realm of the dead” or the “netherworld.” The netherworld is pictured in Akkadian sources as a cheerless place, a kind of cavern deep in the earth to which all people go at death and where there is deprivation and hardship (not penal suffering) but conscious existence. None of these details are in the ot picture, but the view is that the ot pictures some such realm deprived of its pagan associations.

Theologically, this view seems to have some problems. It differs from Christ’s presentation in Lk 16 which describes two places widely separated and greatly different. An old view in the church is that in ot times there was one *limbus patrum* with two divisions from which Christ freed the believers when he descended into hell. This phrase in the Apostles’ Creed is found only in forms of the creed used after the fourth century. It is not used in the Nicene Creed, an elaboration of the Apostles’ Creed. The phrase may have originated in connection with this belief in a *limbus patrum* or in connection with a growing belief in purgatory; it is not clear. The verse in Eph 4:9 is sometimes cited in support of the idea, but it will not stand up. This verse merely refers to the descent of Christ to this earth from which he ascended again to heaven (cf. Eph 4:9 NIV). Besides, Lk 23:43 seems to make this interpretation impossible. The phrase in the Apostles’ Creed has been otherwise interpreted—of Christ’s suffering on the cross (Heidelberg Catechism) or of his burial and continuation in the grave for three days (Westminster Catechism).

An alternative view would find in the passages in Ezk and elsewhere merely a reference to the grave. The phrase “lower parts of the earth” is found eight times. Of special significance are those in Ezk 31–32, where Pharaoh and his contemporary kings are pictured as fallen, slain, lying with the uncircumcised. Note Ezk 32:24 where Elam and her army are said to be in the “grave” (*qeber*), in the “lower parts of the earth” (*’ereṣ taḥtîyôt*) and in the “pit” (*bôr*). In these two chapters the place where the heathen lie is called “grave” (*qeber*) six times; “sheol” five times; “pit” (*bôr*) eight times and “lower parts of the earth” five times. It seems likely that these terms are here used as synonyms referring to the tomb, which was typically a burial cave with ledges on the sides where bodies were buried, sometimes in state and with their armor. In this usage, *’ereṣ taḥtîyôt* means no more than a place below ground where the dead are buried. It need not refer to any mythical location or subterranean place inhabited by ghosts or shades. No special cosmology or mythology is implied.

The other usages of *taḥtî* are Deut 32:22 and Ps 86:13 (both “the depths of Sheol” RSV); Ps 63:9 [H 10] and 139:15 (both “the depths of the earth” RSV); and Ps 88:6 [H 7] (“the depths of the earth” RSV) which would seem to be in line with Ezk’s usage. No emphasis on “depth” seems necessary in the translation. Naturally this does not deny that other vss. speak of conscious existence of the spirit after death. For extended treatment of these and other passages, cf. A. Heidel, “Death and the Afterlife in the OT,” in *The Gilgamesh Epic*, University of Chicago, 1949, pp. 137–223.

R.F.Y.

“The Still Small Voice: Ambiguity and Irony in Hebrew Narrative” by Frank Booth (Excerpt)

“So to the ‘still small voice’. The Hebrew is *“qol demama daqqa”*. Notice the deliberate QDM-MDQ structure, the climax of careful verbal alliteration which has been present throughout the narrative. It emphasises that we are at the final turning point, the crux of the narrative action.

Again we find ambiguity. In Hebrew *qol* can mean either a sound or a voice. So did Elijah just hear a sound, or has God spoken? *Demama* can mean a silence, dumbness, or a moan. When *demama* is used to describe a divine revelation, ‘that which is totally imperceptible, intangible, invisible, and inaudible in the [revelation] is characterised most clearly.’ (1). The sense of mystery at the heart of revelation is deliberately emphasised. *Daqqa* means scarce, thin, fine, but curiously comes from a construction meaning ‘finely ground, like flour’ (2). Not a word normally associated with a sound at all.

So we have three words which in normal construction do not fit together. It is meant to be a verbal shock, a surprise. Again the text is asking a question – ‘is the very idea of divine revelation almost a contradiction in terms?’ At the same time the verbal shock is preparing us for the theological shock to follow; a devastating mission statement from Yahweh which will shatter cultural norms in its covenantal implications for Israel, while at an individual level justifying and reinstating Elijah as a prophet.

A literal translation might be ‘**A sound. A silence. Shattering**’. My personal preference is ‘a silent shimmering sound’, which although not a direct translation, captures something of the verbal poetry and the enigmatic mystery of the original (3). The Early Church Fathers recognised that the expression was meant to imply deliberate “unknowability” (4). Certainly ‘the expression is a paradox and is meant to be understood as such’ (5), ‘an oxymoron, mysterious and puzzling’ (6). We are meant to realise that at the most intense moment of the height of divine revelation, there is ultimate mystery.

On one level we should imagine the intense desert silence, an almost tangible entity as it returns after the impact of the storm, and a familiar experience to the original hearers. **Again the text is asking us a question. Is this merely a natural phenomenon, or can the quiet spoken voice of God himself penetrate our souls at times like these?**

In Hebrew thought, word association is very powerful. You are allowed to build an association of ideas, where words resonate across different Scriptures. So again, to original audience the verbal association of *daqqa* would recall ‘the description of manna as a flaky thin thing (*daq*), a thin thing (*daq*) like hoarfrost from Exodus 16:14’. It would remind them that the *qol demama*

daqqa represents the **manna-like** life-giving word of Yahweh, since 'there was a tradition in Israel that **God's intelligible word, by which one lives, was food, like manna**' (7).

One of the sub-themes of this story has been the nature of revelation, an ascending examination of the nature of the Word of the Lord (8). Now with the resonance of *daqqa*, picking up on the number of Mosaic parallels which have been accumulating since the angelic intervention, the audience are given the strongest clue possible that it is the manna of God, the living Word of the Lord, which is accompanying and directing Elijah. The literary technique of ambiguity is deliberately illusory. It poses the question 'Is Elijah a failure? Is he running away?' But the audience know all along that Elijah will be powerfully vindicated. First by the emphatic divine judgement in favour of the prophet in verses 15-17 and then supremely by his glorious ascension in 2 Kings 2.

Ambiguity can be too subtle for us, lost on those who do not appreciate and enjoy delicate word-play, and so see carefully nuanced meanings as 'textual problems'. However, in oral delivery especially, deliberate 'ambiguity can be used to very pointed effect' so that 'a later twist in the text requires that the reader go back and reconstrue differently what has already been read' (9).

There is general academic agreement that the original audience for the written version we have now would have been the Babylonian diaspora. The deliberate ambiguity enables the exiles to identify with Elijah in his seeming loss of hope, knowing all the time that in the end he will be justified by God. It is not difficult to imagine the Babylonian diaspora readily empathising with Elijah, himself sitting disconsolate in the desert. Like them he seems impotent before a pagan ruler, like them he is outside the Land, like them he wonders whether Yahweh still cares, like them he needs comfort, succour, and assurance.

They know Elijah will yet be vindicated, so for a moment while he sits where they sit, while he feels what they feel, his exile is their exile and his eventual triumphant translation embodies their future hope. ¹ Elijah is an exilic symbol, not to be disparaged and scolded for temporary discouragement, but to be accepted as a fellow traveller who knows the road they are taking, and who by entering into their loss of hope, brings them hope.

Who does this Elijah speak to today? Any who feel as though they have come to the end of themselves and can do no more. Any who go through clinical depression. Any who face rejection in ministry, or whose ministry seems to have failed. Any who experience something of the pain of God's heart for our generation. To all these and more, this Elijah brings the message of the one who still says, I will never leave you or forsake you.

Any preacher who belittles Elijah as a cowardly failure, who should have stayed at his post, has misunderstood the subtleties of the text. Elijah is the iconic hero of inter- testamental Judaism, and it is the ambiguity of allowing him to momentarily seem to share in our failure, that allows hope for all who feel they have sat with him, alone in that desert place, a precursor and a type of the One who would himself be abused and 'rejected by men' (10).

1 Baumann in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament vol.III (Eerdmans, 1987)

2 Johann Lust 'A Gentle Breeze or a Roaring underous Sound? Elijah at Horeb:

1 Kings 19:12' Vetus Testamentum 25/1 (1975) 111

3 It is not always appreciated that some aspects of Hebrew narrative are more poetic in structure than our contemporary ideas of prose.

- 4 Bernard Robinson 'Elijah at Horeb: 1 Kings 19:1-18' Revue Biblique No 98 (1991) 525
5 William Dumbrell 'What are you doing here? Elijah at Horeb' Crux 22/1 (1986) 17
6 Jerome Walsh Style & Structure in Hebrew Narrative (Michael Glazier, 2001) 26
7 Robert Coote 'Yahweh recalls Elijah' in Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith (Eisenbrauns, 1981) 119
8 Jerome Walsh 1 Kings (Berit Olam; Michael Glazier, 1996) 234
9 Walsh 1 Kings xvi
10 The ideas expressed in this article are taken from my MA dissertation which looked at the literary and theological aspects of 1 Kings 19.

(Frank Booth, "The Still Small Voice: Ambiguity and Irony in Hebrew Narrative")

MISC Personal Notes

What defines Elijah is his standing before the Lord. He stands in the most holy place in the heavens and earth, God's throne room. He stands in the manifest presence of God. He does not take his orders from men, but from God himself. He has not entangled himself with the things of this world, but is wholly devoted to the Lord's service. He intimately interacts with God.

Elijah's life is the call for every believer, especially us who live before the coming of the Lord. God's people are now called to be the Elijahs who prepare the way for the second coming of our Lord.

Elijah is defined by prayer. And prayer is not just about talking to God, it's about God talking to you. It's interaction. There may be debating and fighting, but in the end, it's about doing what God says. You get alone with God, you go to the mountain of prayer, in order to go back into the world and do God's will.

qol demamah daqqah

qol - primarily a sound produced by the vocal cords (actual or figurative). "God's *qol* is the roar of thunder...Finally, it is the sound of the trumpet which Moses heard at Sinai." The idea is God's voice is speaking to Elijah. It may not be a audible voice, but a voice spoken to his heart.

demamah - silent, quiet, whisper, calm, stillness, gentle. The idea is that of calming a storm. There was an inner storm going on in Elijah that could only be calmed by the Lord's voice.

daqqah - thin, small, fine. From, crush, grind, break in pieces; used alongside 'threshing'; grinding grain to make bread. In Exodus 16:4 it is used to describe manna, called 'thin' or 'fine flakes' that look like 'frost.' It's also used for the ground incense in the tabernacle.

'a calming and delicate voice' or 'a calming and crushing voice' or 'a whisper' 'a voice that is both quiet and arresting' 'a sound both gentle and thunderous.' 'a sound both still and striking' 'a subtle and strong voice'.

Elijah healing and recommissioning happening through God's powerful voice. It brought him back to his senses and mission. It awakened him from his grief and self-focus. It lifted him out of his feelings and back to God's work.

One of your greatest obstacles to obedience will be your emotions.

Learn to recognize God's voice. You will find that voice in his presence.

The obedience God is looking for is Christ's obedience through you.

Elijah means 'my God is Yahweh.' Is your God Yahweh? Is he your authority? Do you give your sole allegiance to him? Is your ear, his ear?

"God's first words to Elijah are: "What are you doing here?" (Hebrew: mah leka po; meaning literally "What do you have here?" in the sense of "What business do you have here?")." (By Richard Elliot Friedman)