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ELIJAH: A STUDY IN LEGEND

by

Lester A. Frazin

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Hebrew Letters Degree and Ordination.

Hebrew Union College-Jewish  
Institute of Religion  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
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Professor Samuel Sandmel

## S Y N O P S I S

The basic question which I have attempted to answer in this thesis is; why was Elijah chosen by the Haggadists to play the many roles in which we find him throughout Jewish writings. He is pictured as the herald of the Messiah, the counselor of the Rabbis, the advisor and defender of the people, and the censor of the wicked. Why is it that none of the other prophets are granted this distinction by the Haggadists?

The conclusions at which I arrived in my summary chapter are that Elijah was a popular figure in folk literature, not only in post-Biblical times but also before the canonization of the Old Testament. He was a man of mystery, about whom people knew very little except that which they made up themselves. The only event which bears some resemblance to an actual occurrence in the Biblical narrative is the contest on Mount Carmel. This, I believe, is the genesis of the Elijah legends and stories. As with any popular folk character, the prophet who participated in the contest on Carmel became the center of legendary attention as the story was passed down through the centuries. Thus, there was an oral tradition concerning Elijah even before the Old Testament was codified. This tradition was only carried on by the later Haggadists.

My first chapter within this dissertation deals with the Biblical story as it appears in First and Second

Kings. In the second chapter, I concentrate on the attempts of the Haggadists to identify Elijah and place him in time space. Then I retell the Biblical story again but this time embellished with the folklore of the later writers, and my final chapter is devoted to a treatment of the Messianic role of Elijah as found in Jewish and Christian sources. I deal with this facet of the later Haggadic material only because I found it to be the topic which received the most attention from later writers.

Upon the advice of my Referee, Dr. Sandmel, I have also included a critical Bibliography to aid and assist others who may be interested in pursuing this subject further. My personal opinion as to the stories contained within the Biblical narrative and the legendary material have been reserved for the notes and the summary chapter so as not to disrupt the continuity of the material presented within the thesis...

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

The ubiquity of Elijah, the prophet, within Jewish folklore has, for a great while, intrigued me and, at the same time puzzled me. Why, I have asked myself, was Elijah chosen to be the everpresent counselor, advisor or censor of the Jewish people, as illustrated within the legends and homely tales? Were there not greater Biblical characters, such as Moses, or one of the Patriarchs upon whom this honor could have been bestowed? In an attempt to find the answer to these questions, I have investigated the subject of Elijah and this dissertation contains the results of my studies in the field.

In order to lay the groundwork for the later Haggadic treatment of the character, Elijah, I have devoted my entire first chapter to the Biblical narrative as it appears in First and Second Kings. Beginning with the second chapter, I have presented the legendary material dealing with the Biblical Elijah.

Due to time and space limitations, I have not been able, within this paper, to pursue the topic throughout the vast amount of later legendary material which, although important, is not primarily concerned with the Biblical tale. I have, however, in assessing the later material, come to the conclusions that Elijah's messianic role received the greatest attention from the Haggadists. Therefore, my

fifth chapter deals exclusively with this facet of Elijah's post-Biblical career.

In the collection of the legends I am greatly indebted to Ginzburg's Legends of the Jews, to which I referred for many, if not most of my sources, and from which I obtained many of the legends concerning the prophet, Elijah. My purpose, of course, is not to duplicate the treatment of the subject as it appears in Ginzburg, but to give a clearer, more comprehensible view of the topic.

I have refrained from making any personal judgments on the material throughout the thesis so as to allow the reader to peruse the dissertation and, without any inhibiting or influencing remarks on my part, arrive at his own conclusion. Rather, I have designated my own opinions and impressions for the notes and the summary. It is in this last chapter. It is in this last chapter that I try to answer the question as to why Elijah assumed so much popularity within the consciousness of the Jewish people and their folktales.

In conclusion, it is my sincere desire that the reader may seek to learn more about the character which I have presented, and may possibly, draw conclusions of his own which may add a new dimension to the material written about the prophet, Elijah.

## CHAPTER I

### THE BIBLICAL ELIJAH

During the reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, in the first half of the ninth century, Elijah the "Tishbite" suddenly appears in Israel. According to the account in I Kings, Elijah's appearance is unpredicted; his birth is unknown; and his homeland, or city, is briefly mentioned. "Elijah the Tishbite, who was from the dwellers of Giliad" (I K. 17.1)<sup>1</sup> is the only mention of lineage, or residence, in the Biblical narrative.<sup>2</sup>

He appeared without forewarning before Ahab, the king of Israel and his first recorded words were a curse hurled against the land and the inhabitants therein. His dire predictions, of a lack of rain and dew for some years, seem to come without provocation. It is possible that the curse was a rebuke to Ahab for his apostasy, and to Hiel for rebuilding Jericho. (Chapter 16). These events preceded the appearance of Elijah and, therefore, might explain his motive for uttering such a diatribe against the land.

He further states that this curse will not be relieved until he, Elijah, decides to again allow the rain to fall.<sup>3</sup> His statement being, "there shall not be, these years, dew and rain, except according to my word" (17.1).

After placing this curse on Ahab and the land, the narrative continues with God telling Elijah to flee "eastward" (17.3) and hide by the "brook Cherith which is before



the Jordan" (17.3). There a miraculous phenomenon has been prepared to sustain him in the form of the ravens, who had been commanded by God to feed him while he was in hiding (17.4).

Elijah followed the bidding of God and went to hide by the brook (17.5). There, the ravens obligingly brought him his meals twice a day (17.6). But after a while, his stay by the brook, from which he took drinking water, was ignobly disrupted when the stream dried up because "there was no rain in the land"(17.7) Hence the severity of his curse even affected him, and he was forced to leave his hiding place and seek shelter elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> The author of the story wrote that God told him to go to Zarepath, and there, dwell with a widow whom God had also commanded to sustain him (17.8-9).

Again Elijah followed God's instructions and went to Zarepath which belonged to Sidon (17.9). Zarepath was in Phoenicia, "about four hours journey south of Sidon,"<sup>6</sup> and, therefore, out of the boundaries of Israel, and remote from the wrath of Ahab and the people.

In Zarepath he met the widow whom God had chosen to provide food and housing for him. He asked her to fetch him some water, which she immediately did, without question. But when he asked for "a piece of bread" (17.10-11), she hesitated, and said that she had only enough flour and oil for one last meal. This meagre portion was the only thing which separated her son, and herself, from starvation. Elijah again asked her to make one last cake and bring the first portion to him; the rest she and her son could eat.

He justified this request by telling her that the Lord has said: "The jar of flour shall not be consumed nor the cruise of oil until the day that the Lord will give rain upon the face of the earth" (17.14). After hearing this, she did as Elijah had requested of her, and God's promise was fulfilled throughout the duration of the famine.

All was peaceful in the house of the widow, who sustained Elijah, until her son fell gravely ill, and his condition was so serious "that there was no breath left within him" (17.17). In this trying moment the widow lost her composure and loosed a diatribe against Elijah, saying: "what have I to do with you, O man of God, that you have come to me to recall my sins and to cause my son to die?" (17.18). This reaction to her grief did not anger Elijah but rather, filled him with compassion. He took the body of the dead boy to his room, laid him down upon his bed, and cried out against the Lord, asking Him why he had brought this "evil upon the widow" (17.20), with whom he dwelt. Then he stretched himself out upon the boy three times, praying to God to return the boy's soul, and proceeded to revive the son of the widow.

When he brought the boy down alive to his mother she acclaimed him a true "man of God" with "the word of the Lord" within (17.24) his mouth.

During the three years of the famine we hear nothing more about Elijah. The tale resumes in the third year when God tells Elijah to go show himself to Ahab, at which

time God will again cause the rain to fall upon the land. On his way to see Ahab, Elijah met Obediah who had befriended and hid the hundred prophets of the Lord, when Jezebel sought to slay them. Elijah instructed Obediah to go and tell Ahab that he was on his way to meet him. But Obediah was afraid that while he was gone "the spirit of the Lord" (18.12) would carry Elijah to some unknown place, thus making false his words, with the result that Ahab, in his anger, would kill him. He reasoned this from the fact that Ahab had sent him throughout the lands of the earth to find Elijah, and now, claiming to have found him; if his report would prove erroneous, it would mean his life.

Elijah, to allay his fears, said that he would definitely show himself to Ahab; and with this assurance, Obediah reported his encounter with Elijah to Ahab. Ahab then "went out to meet Elijah" (18.16).

Upon meeting Elijah, Ahab accused him of causing trouble to come upon Israel. Elijah answered, that it was Ahab, who, through his apostasy, was causing the evil to fall upon the land (namely the famine). It was at this point that Elijah issued the famous challenge to the King to bring the "450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Ashera" (18.19) to Mount Carmel, for a contest of their respective strengths.

The contest on Carmel is the high point of the story? It does more than elevate the character, Elijah; it also announces that God is the supreme Ruler of the world. In

the eyes of the people who witnessed the contest there was no doubt as to who was the greatest prophet, or the real deity: it was Elijah and Yahweh.

Ahab did as Elijah had instructed him, and gathered the prophets, and also all of the people of Israel on Mount Carmel. There, before the contest began, Elijah asked the people, "how long will you stumble between two opinions"? (18.21) If Yahweh is God, worship only Him; but if Baal is God then commit yourselves to him. Here was the stated purpose of the contest; to show who was The God.

Elijah gave the instructions for the preparation of the bullocks upon the altar. Then he issued the challenge that the "God who answers with fire will be THE God" (18.24). The prophets and the people agreed with the procedure and the contest was under way.

In almost a ludicrous fashion, the prophets of Baal begged, conjoled, danced, stumbled and lacerated themselves until their blood flowed out upon their bodies, but without any answer from their "god". This fanatic folly went on past the noon hour and continued, while Elijah mocked and scorned their god, until late afternoon, when Elijah called a halt to their unsuccessful actions. At the time of the meal offering he called the people together, "and they all drew near unto him and he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been overthrown" (18.30). He dedicated the altar in the name of the Lord, laid out the wood, cut up the bullock, and placed it upon the altar. To make his task more

difficult, he had water poured upon the altar three times, so much water, in fact, that it filled the trench surrounding the altar. "And it was at the time of the meal offering" (18.36) that Elijah prayed unto the Lord, asking Him to answer, so that the people would know that He is God. Suddenly, the fire of the Lord rained down, igniting the altar of wood and stone, totally consuming it, its dust, and even the water in the trench.<sup>10</sup> Whereupon the people "fell upon their faces and twice said, "the Lord, He is The God" 18.39.

Elijah had won the battle for Yahweh, and established in the process, that he was a true prophet of God; able to produce miracles before all the people with the aid of God. With such authority vested in him, by mutual consent, he ordered the destruction of the prophets of Baal. After the people had destroyed the alien prophets by the brook of Kishon, Elijah invited Ahab to eat and drink, for rain was coming. Saying this, Elijah went to the top of Carmel and "bowed himself down to the ground, and put his face between his knees" (18.42), to pray for rain. Seven times he sent his servant lad to see if there was a cloud arising from the sea, which would forecast rain. On the seventh time, the lad saw a cloud which grew so large that "the heavens grew black with the clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (18.45). Just as Elijah had predicted so it happened. With the rain pouring down, and the 'hand of God' upon him, Elijah girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of the city of Jezreel (18.46).

When Ahab reached Jezreel, and related the death of the prophets to Jezebel, she sent a note to Elijah swearing to kill him as he had had her prophets killed. With this threat hanging over him, he ran from his abode and fled into the wilderness. On the way, he left his servant lad in Beer Sheba, and from there, traveled alone for one day. Sitting beneath a broom tree, in the wilderness, he begged God to take his life. He was obviously tired of the threats and fears which had befallen him in his life.

An Angel of the Lord later found him asleep and proceeded to wake him. He showed Elijah a cake baked on hot stones, and bade him to eat it, which he did, and promptly fell asleep again. After the first meeting, the angel returned again and told him to eat another cake, for he was going to take a long journey. This time, however, after he had consumed the meal, he arose and traveled forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, "the mountain of God" (19.8). During the entire trip he was sustained by the food which he ate in that second meal.

After arriving at Horeb, he came to a cave in which the word of God came to him and asked him, almost indignantly, what business he had in the cave. This gave him an opportunity to state his case before God. He said: "I have been extremely jealous for the Lord, God of Hosts, for the Children of Israel have forsaken your covenant and overthrown your altars and killed your prophets with the sword and I, I alone am left and they sought to take

my life" (19.10).

After he had made this accusation, implying that he wanted revenge, a great wind and earthquake occurred, but God's answer was not in them. After the two holocausts had subsided, a still small voice was heard<sup>11</sup>, and Elijah, in reverence, "wrapped his face in a mantle, and went out and stood by the door of the cave---and behold a voice came saying; 'what are you doing here Elijah?'"(19.13)

Rather than change the nature of the wording of his accusation, Elijah again restated what he had said in answer to this question before. Thus, Elijah's uncompromising return forced God to tell him to return and anoint Hazael, as king of Aram, Jehu, as king of Israel, and most important, Elisha, as his successor. This was a direct rebuff to Elijah. Elijah felt that he had done all the Lord's bidding, and yet, at the moment when God could support his cause, he was told to appoint a successor, for his job was coming to an end. Elisha was to be a "prophet in his stead" (19.16).

Elijah said no more, but instead, God continued speaking, and predicted the downfall of all the people of Israel, save seven thousand, who were to remain faithful to Him. It seemed that, after all, Elijah was to have his revenge, but Elisha, Jehu and Hazael would take it for him. He would not be there. On this note, Elijah left Horeb.

From Horeb, Elijah went to find Elisha, and came upon him while he was plowing a field. He cast his mantle

upon him, thus designating Elisha as his successor. But Elisha, although willing to follow Elijah, requested that before they leave, he be permitted to say goodbye to his parents. At that moment, when Elijah gave him permission to do so, he regreted he said, "Go, return, for what have I done to you?" (19.21) Elisha did so, and then returned to Elijah, and became his apprentice.

After this tender episode, the Biblical narrative switches from Elijah to tell the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. The Bible tells of Ahab acquiring the vineyard through treachery executed by Jezebel. Elijah then appears, and we see another facet of his career and personality. Elijah, in this sequence of events, is the censor of the king's greed and actions.

After Naboth had been stoned, and Ahab had taken possession of the vineyard, Elijah, acting upon the word of God, confronted Ahab in the stolen garden.<sup>12</sup> He predicted not only Ahab's doom, but, also the doom of his household and his wife. The words of Elijah were so harsh and distressing, that Ahab, upon hearing them, immediately became penitent, and tore his clothing, as if in mourning. God, in seeing this, and being merciful, informed Elijah that the downfall of the house of Ahab would take place in the days of his son rather than in Ahab's day.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Ahab's death would be extremely ignoble. For his many sins, he was rewarded with the promise that dogs will lick his blood. This prediction came true to the



last horrid detail.

The story then becomes concerned with Ahaziah, the son of the dead king, Ahab, who had fallen ill. As may have been the practice, he sent his messengers to Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to find out whether or not he would recover. Then an angel of the Lord, appeared to Elijah and told him to go out and meet the messengers of the king, and predict the death of their master. Elijah hearkened to the words of the angel and did as he was commanded. When the messengers returned to the king with his dire oracle, Ahaziah sought to find out the identity of the prophet, who had predicted his doom. And, when told of the prophet's appearance, by his messengers, the king realized that the man whom they had met, was none other than Elijah, the seer whose prophecies concerning his father, were all too true.

Prompted by the fear of Elijah's message, Ahaziah, in anger, sent one of his captains, with a complement of fifty troops, to bring Elijah to the palace. They immediately went in search of the prophet and found him sitting on the top of a mountain. Coarsely, the captain ordered him to descend and to follow the troops to the king. But Elijah, fearful for his life, and angry at the captain's arrogant manner said, "If I am a man of God, let a fire come down from the heavens and consume you and your fifty" (II K.1.10). No sooner had he spoken, than a fire descended and destroyed the force.

A second time Ahaziah sent the same number of men, with their captain, and a second time Elijah commanded the

angry flames and they were consumed. But the third group that went out was led by a captain who was more afraid of Elijah than his predecessors had been. Upon finding Elijah, the captain bowed down before him and pleaded with him to spare his life and the life of his men. An angel, then, came to Elijah and gave him the assurance that he needn't be afraid of this man, and further, that he should go with him. Elijah, obeying the angel, followed the captain to the palace.

Once there, he confronted the king and accused him of his apostasy and wickedness. In no uncertain terms, he repeated his former prophecy; as Elijah had predicted, the king died upon the bed, on which he lay. The fearful decree, made before Ahab, had now come true, for Ahaziah died without leaving an heir. But Elijah, too, was to leave this world.

Elijah had fulfilled his role; he was now about to die, or rather, be translated, taken alive to heaven. It was at this time, that Elijah, with his disciple, Elisha, left Gilgal. Elijah had asked Elisha to remain behind, giving him the reason that God was sending him to Beth El, but Elisha would not forsake him. Elisha also knew that Elijah's translation was at hand. In fact, not only did Elijah and Elisha share this knowledge, but also the professional prophets in Beth El and Jericho as well. When the two reached Beth El, on their way to the Jordan, the prophets approached Elisha and told him that that was to be the day of his master's translation. Elisha, full of

sorrow at the knowledge of his forthcoming loss, asked them to be silent.

At Beth El, Elijah, again asked Elisha to stay behind and again the disciple refused. When they reached Jericho, the sons of the prophets there came to Elisha and told him of his master's impending translation. They received the same answer as the prophets in Beth El: be silent.

Elijah, when they reached the Jordan, rolled up his mantle, split the sea, and both of them crossed over on dry land, while fifty of the prophets of Jericho stood and watched on the opposite shore.<sup>14</sup> It was while they were crossing and talking that Elisha asked for and received a double portion of the miraculous powers of Elijah, that is, if he would be able to view the translation scene. This conversation was soon interrupted for: "While they were walking and talking, a fiery chariot and horses of fire separated them, and Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind of the heavens" (II K. 2.11). Elisha cried out for Elijah, but it was to no avail. And while Elijah was being translated, his mantle fell from off his shoulders. Elisha picked it up and in retracing his steps, split the Jordan and crossed over to the other side.

After the translation, the prophets of Jericho insisted on sending out fifty of their men to seek and try to find Elijah. They returned, however, after three days, empty-handed. Elisha had told them, before they went out, that such a search would be useless, but contrary to his

opinion, they thought that perhaps the spirit of God had wafted Elijah to some valley or hill, and not to heaven. As a result of not heeding Elisha's word, their search was futile and they finally admitted that Elijah must be in heaven.<sup>15</sup>

Who was Elijah? From where did he come? To what tribe did he belong? And what happened to him after his translation? All these questions, and more, are left unanswered in the Biblical narrative. In fact, from the Biblical story, we know very little about the character, Elijah the prophet. His lineage and his death are both unknown. Sudden appearances and disappearances are the only answers given. His personality is composed of a short temper, an irreconcilable hatred of idolatry and evil, studded with a fear of mortal death and defeatism in the face of same. Little else is known. His life's story is a potpourri of miracles and accurate future predictions.

But if we lack many answers to the genealogy, the death, or translation of Elijah, and the more obvious gaps in the Biblical account, then we must understand that these same questions bothered later writers, who for one reason or another, attempted to answer them, as we shall see in the following chapters.

## C H A P T E R   I I

### WHO WAS ELIJAH?

One of the primary ventures of the later Aggadists, in their embellishment of the Biblical story of Elijah, was to try and decide just who this miraculous Elijah was. The Biblical tale in First and Second Kings gave no help. They knew simply that he was a "Tishbe", which was either a family, tribe, or city name; and that at the time of the opening of the story, he was dwelling in Gilead. At another time in the story he went to Phoenicia, and later, east of the Jordan, but it never states that he returned home. His travels took him throughout the length and breadth of the land, but no one spot is ever designated as his permanent place of residence.

In Elijah, the Aggadists had a personality who was unique in the Bible. There was no record of his birth, his parents, or his family. His death is shrouded by the supernatural occurrence of his translation. His life's story is a recitation of one miracle or prophecy after another.

Even Elisha, who performed twice as many miracles as his master, had parents, as witnessed by the fact that he wished to kiss them good-bye. And Enoch, another character who found popularity in later literature, had not only one, but two versions of his birth (Gen.5.24). Elijah's

translation is vividly depicted, leaving no doubt, in the reader's mind, as to his final disappearance. Thus, the way was clear for all sorts of speculations about the identity of Elijah, and the Rabbis went to work trying to ascertain his geneology and identity.

Eliyahu Raba and Eliyahu Zutra<sup>1</sup> state that the tribes of Benjamin and Gad competed with the tribe of Levi for the privilege of claiming Elijah as one of their own. It is said that Moses wrote the psalm, dealing with the vengeance of the Lord, for the tribe of Gad, from which Elijah came.<sup>2</sup> To another writer, Elijah was a contemporary of Moses, being born in the tribe of Zebulun. In fact, he was one of the seventy elders picked by Moses, in the wilderness, to help him decide legal issues.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Eliezer b. Padas, trying to compromise the problem, proposed that Elijah was from both the tribes of Benjamin and (here adding a new element) Judah.<sup>4</sup>

As to where he lived, there was also disagreement. In commenting on First Kings 17.1, which is the first mention of Elijah, and which says, "Elijah the Tishbite, who was from the dwellers of Gilead," Kimhi, the rationalist, stated that Elijah was originally from another city, but was dwelling in Gilead prior to his appearance before Ahab. The Tosafot on Ta'anit 3a states that he was one of the original dwellers of Jabesh Gilead, but he was forced to evacuate, with the other residents when the rest of Israel attacked the city.<sup>5</sup> Later, he returned with the remaining refugees who referred to themselves as "the

inhabitants of Gilead", to show a distinction between themselves and between the new settlers of the city. Even Rabbi Eliezer b. Padas entered the discussion and declared Elijah to be an inhabitant of Jerusalem, who dwelt in the chambers of hewn stone.

### WHO WAS THE PERSON, ELIJAH?

Since there is neither a mention of his birth, nor the usual formula connected with Hebrew names, such as Elijah ben so-and-so, there existed a void which the Rabbis felt needed to be filled. One of the most common answers to 'who was Elijah' was the identification of the prophet with Phineas b. Eliezer, the zealot of the wilderness generation. But this raised a few problems for the Aggadists.

The most obvious one was the age factor. Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, born in Egypt anywhere from 1200 to 1400 B.C.E., would have been from 350 to 550 years old when Elijah first came on the scene. This, of course, must be based on the assumption that the Exodus took place in either the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries,<sup>6</sup> and the reign of Ahab was c. 853 to 875 B.C.E.<sup>7</sup>

The only answers which I have been able to find have either been mere affirmation of the belief, without any evidence, except the lack of information concerning Phineas' death, or complete silence on the subject.

The second question raised was, that Phineas, being the grandson of Aaron, was a priest. But where does it

mention that Elijah was a priest? This the Rabbis answered easily, by showing that Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel was accepted by God, ergo, he must have been a priest. If that was not enough proof, Kimḥi echoed a popular belief in his commentary on First Kings 17:3, that the first portion of the cake, which Elijah requested from the widow of Zarepath, was the priestly portion.

Much of tradition followed this accepted belief. Ps. Philo<sup>8</sup> stated that Phineas b. Eliezer and Elijah were one and the same. This, in fact, was the first mention of the relationship which later flourished in midrashic works and commentaries, such as: Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer,<sup>9</sup> Targum Yerusalmi, on Exodus 6:18, Numbers 25:12, and Deut. 30:4. Origen is also familiar with this belief and adheres to it.<sup>10</sup>

Another mention of this theory is found in connection with Moses. It is said that during his forty-day stay in "heaven" he learned the secrets of the angels, and then passed them on to Phineas, who is also known as Elijah.<sup>11</sup>

But there were others who objected to this relationship. They refused to identify Elijah with Phineas. He was a priest like Phineas, yes, but he was not Phineas. The sources for this rebuttal were important ones, such as; Baba Metzia 114b and Tosefta Targum on First Kings 17:13. Some of the Church fathers also followed this line of reasoning, but the final decision as to whether or not Phineas and Elijah were one and the same is a question which is to be left for Elijah to decide--Teku, said one authority.<sup>12</sup>



WAS ELIJAH HUMAN?

There were many who did not even bother to identify Elijah with another human being, but rather, postulated that he was an angel in disguise. Some mention of this belief is to be found in Talmudic sources. But most of the references to Elijah, as an angel, are to be found in the more mystical books, such as, the Zohar and Sefer Hasidim. The latter states that since Elijah had neither a mother nor a father, he must have been an angel, and when it became necessary for him to descend to earth, he donned the form of a man. Of course, this easily explains his ability to do miracles. Rabbi Shimon b. Yochai once claimed to have found the secret to Elijah's translation. Since the heavens, he said, could not hold all the bodies of men, from all time, he found there is predicted in the story of Adam that a certain spirit will descend to earth and be clothed in the body of a man. This spirit will perform missions for men and God, upon the earth. This was Elijah. When he finished, his spirit was removed from his body, and the body was left in the whirlwind for future use, while the spirit soared to heaven.

In this belief we have Elijah clearly identified as an angel who performs certain missions with man, for God. And in the performance of his duty he clothes himself in human form.

When did Elijah first receive his commission, asked the Rabbis? We are all familiar with the Midrash describing the dissident voices of the angelic band when God

decided to create man. All the angels objected, except Elijah, who at that time was known as Sandalphon.<sup>13</sup> He said that he would descend to earth and help man convert to God, and after making this declaration, he was appointed to perform his services during the reign of Ahab.<sup>14</sup> But his activities on earth did not cease with his translation to heaven, after the reign of Ahab, nor have they stopped to-day said the Rabbis, but they will continue until the Messiah arrives.

This theorizing, of course, broached the problem of an angel, who is spirit, becoming a man of flesh and blood. Zohar Wayikra attempts an answer in which it states that Elijah had two bodies, one in which he appeared to men during the reign of Ahab, and one in which he appeared before the angels. In fact, he has many corporeal forms, including a female body, as is shown in Abodah Zarah. This ability to change into a female is something which the average angel can never hope to do, therefore, Elijah must be superior to the other angels.<sup>15</sup> This female guise is seen in a story about Rabbi Meir who was once fleeing from the Romans, because he had been unjustly accused of breaking a certain law. Elijah appeared to Rabbi Meir as a harlot and accompanied him. When the pursuing Romans saw Rabbi Meir, or the one who they believed to be he, in the company of a harlot, they stopped the chase. They reasoned that a person of Rabbi Meir's character would never be seen in the company of a harlot and, therefore, they were chasing

the wrong man. Because of this, Rabbi Meir fled safely from his would-be captors.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we see in the attempts to reconcile the identity of Elijah, tradition carries us from the more or less rational viewpoint to the extreme mystical and supernatural. In fact, one need not look too closely to find a sequence of beliefs: from the rational attempt, in which he is simply a dweller of Jabesh Gilead, to the unnatural, in which he and Phineas are one person, to the mystical and supernatural, in which he is an angel, capable of many superior abilities.

As to his home, we have the simple, straightforward statement of the Biblical account, which says, that he is a 'Tisbe' from Gilead. This, however, was not satisfactory for the later teachers who ascribed him to four tribes: Gad, because he dwelt in Gilead, Zebulun, to coincide with the belief that he was one of the seventy elders in the wilderness, Levi, because of the assumption that he was a priest, and also, because Phineas was a Levi, and Benjamin, because of the statement of Rabbi Eliezer b. Padas who states that he was a Yerusalmi, which coincides with the mention of an Elijah in a geneology in First Chronicles 8:26.

What gave credence to the above-mentioned beliefs? In order to find an answer to the Aggadic view of Elijah, we must, again, discuss the Biblical story. This time we shall include some of the legends and information attached

to the narrative which were set forth by later teachers and writers, who attempted to explain the tale and fill all lacunae.

### C H A P T E R   I I I

#### THE BIBLICAL STORY AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF THE AGGADIST.

Compared to the later legends appended to the Biblical account, the canonical narrative of Elijah was fairly simple, with but few contradictions and unsolved mysteries. The aggadic writers, in their explanations of and additions to the Elijah narrative, created a more mystical person, to be sure, a more developed character. But concomitant with this heightened development are more contradictions. In order to fully see this, we will now retell the Biblical story with many of its later embellishments.

As we have seen, Elijah came from out of nowhere and uttered a curse of famine upon the land. As we noted before, his vehement words seemed to be without provocation. The real story, said the Rabbis, was this; Elijah happened to be before Ahab because God had commanded him to visit Hiel and comfort him upon the loss of his two sons, during his rebuilding of Jericho. Ahab was also visiting Hiel, making a pastoral call, but when Elijah first appeared, both Hiel and Ahab provoked him by mocking God and flaunting idolatry right before his eyes. This made Elijah very angry and in retribution for this ill-advised action on the part of Ahab and Hiel, he cursed the land, and predicted a cessation of rain. The wording of

the Biblical curse, in which Elijah said that there would not be rain or dew except according to "his word", indicated that Elijah controlled the elements. But the Rabbis explained that God had made the promise to Elijah in return for visiting Hiel, that he would fulfill any word which Elijah would utter.<sup>1</sup> In other words, though Elijah put the curse in the first person, he really meant that God would withhold the rain and dew. In reality, Elijah caused the famine, not through anger, says another source, but in love for the people. He wished to arouse the mercy of God upon the people who had been practicing idolatry, and the famine distracted God's anger from these people. Rather, God pitied the people's plight in their moment of hunger.<sup>2</sup>

After uttering the curse, Elijah fled and went into hiding by the brook of Cherith, because he was afraid of the vengeance of Ahab and Jezebel.<sup>3</sup> In his covert cave, he was fed by the ravens who had been commanded, by God, to bring him food. He received liquid nourishment from the waters of the brook. But were they real ravens or does the Bible mean something else when it uses the term 'ravens'? Most of the Rabbis said yes; the Bible means real ravens. But some of the rationalists stated that the word, 'Arabin', meaning 'ravens', really refers to the dwellers of the city of Oreb, who fed Elijah.<sup>4</sup> Others said that 'Arabin' meant merchants, who traveled by that region.<sup>5</sup>

From where did the ravens obtain the food? Some of the Aggadists stated that the ravens brought the food from

the slaughtering house of Ahab, while others held that the food was from the very dining table of the king. Others said that these ravens would not even approach the house of Ahab and brought the food from the table of the pious king Jehosaphat.<sup>6</sup> Aphraates, the Syriac-Christian writer of the fourth century C.E., said that the ravens brought the food to Elijah from the priestly portion in the Temple at Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

But how could a raven supply food to a man? The Aggadists stated that the ravens were commanded from creation to change their nature and feed Elijah in the cave.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Noah was instructed to take the ravens in a second time, because they were destined to feed Elijah in the cave.<sup>9</sup> And, of course, the food they brought was kosher; after all, God would not allow the ravens to bring Elijah non-kosher food.<sup>10</sup>

So Elijah was comfortable until the stream dried up, at which time, Elijah, too, felt the need for rain. God had purposely dried up the stream so as to force Elijah to recall the curse. This act on the part of Elijah would have released God from His promise of fulfilling Elijah's word, as long as he insisted.<sup>11</sup> But Elijah was inflexible, even in his thirst; so God had to try another approach.

Elijah was told to go and seek shelter from the widow of Zarepath, who would also sustain him. He went to Zarepath and met the widow by a well, from which she gave him water to drink.<sup>12</sup> He then asked for food from

her, but she complained about how little food she had, and told him that she couldn't spare any food. Elijah was insistent and again asked for the first portion of a small cake, made from what little she had left; the first portion because he was a priest.<sup>13</sup> She finally relented and did as Elijah had requested of her; but to her surprise and benefit, received in return an endless supply of oil and flour. Elijah then went and took up residence with her and her son, who was, in reality, the prophet, Jonah.<sup>14</sup> There he lived with her, her son, and her entire family.<sup>15</sup>

In the course of time, the boy fell ill. This was also purposely done by God so that Elijah would return the key to rain which he had received when he uttered the curse against Ahab. There were, in actuality, three keys; one for rain, one for resurrection, and one for birth. Two of the three always remained in the possession of God. When the boy died, Elijah asked God for the key of resurrection, but God refused on the grounds that it was improper that the disciple should have two of the keys while the Master has only one. If Elijah would relinquish the key of rain then God would give him the key to resurrection. And it was only after Elijah returned the key of rain to God, that he was able to revive the boy. God had perpetrated this in order to soften Elijah, because without dew, which was a necessary item in resurrection, Elijah would have failed to revive the child.<sup>16</sup> But even though Elijah did return the key of rain to God, it still did not rain in the land.



This is a distinct contradiction which remained unresolved.

The process of reviving the child was thusly: Elijah stretched himself out upon the boy, with his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes to the child's eyes, and his hands on the boy's hands.<sup>17</sup> And after Elijah had successfully brought the boy back to life, he brought him down from his room and gave him to the widow, who, in a burst of gratitude, proclaimed Elijah to be a true "man of God".

This title of honor nominated Elijah to be one of the select minion of men who, in the Bible, were called, "men of God". The other nine were: Moses, Elkanan, Samel, David, Iddo, Shemiah, Elisha, Michaiiah, and Amos.<sup>18</sup>

For over three years, during which the famine was in the land, Elijah lived with the widow and her son. Finally, God commanded Elijah to appear to Ahab; he did post-haste. At this very time, Obediah and Ahab, searching for grass and fodder for the royal animals, had separated to seek the food in different sections of the land. Obediah was the righteous elder of the court, who had hidden the hundred prophets of Yahweh from Jezebel when she sought to kill them all. It was this Obediah, whom Elijah met on the way. The prophet commanded him to tell Ahab of his presence but Obediah was reluctant to do so for fear that Elijah would disappear when it was time for the meeting and his report would prove false. Ahab was in no mood to be toyed with, and if Obediah's words were false,

then the king would surely kill him. But Elijah allayed his fears and promised him that he would present himself to Ahab for a meeting. Ahab, upon hearing the news from Obediah, went out to meet Elijah. When they came together, Ahab said, "is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" Elijah countered this accusation by placing the blame of Israel's afflictions on Ahab, who had caused them by his apostasy and evil. Then to cap the argument, Elijah proposed the contest on Carmel. Carmel had been chosen because all of the mountains had contested for the right to aid Elijah, but God had picked Carmel on which he would support the cause of his prophet.<sup>19</sup>

The purpose for which Elijah had intended the contest, was to bring all the people back to the worship of God, through signs and wonders. This, he reasoned, he had to do before he would yield to God and allow Him to cause rain to fall again.<sup>20</sup>

Ahab, following the instructions of Elijah, set forth to complete his end of the bargain and brought all the people of Israel plus the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, to Carmel. Elijah was the lone prophet of Yahweh. But where were the hundred prophets who had remained loyal to God and whom Obediah had saved?

Jerome, on Obediah 1:1, stated that they were among seven thousand loyal people whom Elijah ignored.

After all had assembled, Elijah, admonishing the people asked them how long they planned to worship both

Baal and Yahweh, unable to determine which was the true God. He declared that the purpose of the contest was to show them that Baal was merely an idol and no more, and Yahweh is the only God for them to worship. The people would be the living witnesses to the merit of his words.

The sacrifice on Carmel caused great consternation among the Rabbis. Since God had ordained the Temple to be the only acceptable place to sacrifice, was this contest on Carmel a direct breach of God's words? They finally agreed that Elijah permitted himself to temporarily suspend the laws of sacrifice. This type of temporary suspension was actually at the command of God, who said, that though the prophets have no right to abrogate the law; they may suspend them temporarily.<sup>21</sup>

After Elijah addressed the people, he instructed his opponents as to how the sacrifice would take place. They were told to take a bull, dress it and place it upon the altar, but not set a fire. But when it came time for the prophets of Baal to prepare the bullock, the animal refused to move. Elijah had had no trouble with his bull, but the other prophets could not budge theirs. Elijah approached the animal and asked him why he would not follow the prophets of Baal. The bull answered that since Elijah's bullock was his twin, and was going to be sacrificed to God, he also wanted to have the honor of being sacrificed to the real God, and not an idol. In fact, he refused to move, because he was afraid that he would provoke God by being a

willing sacrifice to a false image. Whereupon, Elijah assured him that he would glorify God also in the contest by proving that Baal was false. With this knowledge the bullock allowed Elijah to lead him to the prophets of Baal and give him to them.<sup>22</sup>

The prophets of Baal took the bull and dressed it. They then cried out to Baal, from morning to mid-afternoon, invoking his fire, but with no response. All the while, Elijah mocked them and heaped abuse upon their so-called god. At one point in the proceedings, Hiel attempted to light a false fire, in the name of Baal, but God frustrated his attempt.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, after they had exhausted themselves in their fanatical frenzy, Elijah gathered the people around him and repaired the altar of God which had been overthrown. Some believed this altar to be the 'Yad' which Saul set up on Mount Carmel, after his victorious campaign against Amalek, but which was later destroyed by the evil inhabitants around Carmel.<sup>24</sup> The repairing of the altar took a great deal of time, and in order for Elijah to perform the sacrifice at the time of the meal offering, which was the most acceptable time to God, he ordered the sun to stand still, and it obeyed his command.<sup>25</sup> Elijah built the altar with twelve stones so as to recall the merit of the fathers, which would help him gain the favor of God in his contest.<sup>26</sup> Then he dug a trench around the altar, laid out the wood and placed the bullock in position. After this was done, he

had Elijah pour water over his hands three times,<sup>27</sup> in remembrance of the patriarchs,<sup>28</sup> and suddenly water gushed forth from his fingers and filled the trench round about the altar.<sup>29</sup>

Elijah then prayed to God to send the fire. His prayer differed from the usual prayer, in that he said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," rather than, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," so as to show that there is only one God and not three.<sup>30</sup> In this same prayer, he speaks boldly to God and accuses Him of making the people's hearts turn backwards. This unusual statement served a two-fold purpose. First, it showed the people that God controls their evil acts as well as their good ones, and might possibly even cause them. Second, he partially blames God for their apostasy, in that God created the Evil Inclination within the people.<sup>31</sup>

Immediately following his prayer, the fire of the Lord fell and consumed, not only the burnt sacrifice, but also, the wood, stones, dust, and water which was in the trench. After viewing this awesome spectacle, the people acknowledged Yahweh as THE God.

The fire that God had sent was one of the six fires of "token and distinction" which He has sent and will send to man. The other five were: at Noah's sacrifice, at the consecration of the Tabernacle, which also destroyed Nadab and Abihu, at Manoach's sacrifice, at Solomon's consecration

of the Temple, and the last of the six will be when the Temple is rebuilt during the days of the Messiah.<sup>32</sup> The miracle at Carmel had served its purpose and the people came back to God completely.<sup>33</sup>

After the contest was over, and Elijah had gained the confidence and awe of the people, he commanded them to kill the prophets of Baal. And the people followed his instructions to the letter.

Being satisfied with his victory and the resulting affirmation of the people, Elijah told Ahab to go and eat, for rain now would descend upon the land. Ahab left Elijah to go to his tent and the prophet went up again to the top of Carmel, bowed himself down to the ground and put his face between his knees. His servant lad then went to see if a cloud had arisen over the sea. Elijah had promised the people that now that they had accepted God rain would again fall on the land. He told God this in his prayer and asserted that since he made this promise to the people, if God still refused to allow the rain to come, then what faith would the people have in him when he came to announce the Messiah, in the future days. Therefore, he said, God must allow the rain to fall, otherwise the people, who now expressed their confidence in him, would consider him to be false to his word.<sup>34</sup> In the prayer for rain, Elijah mentioned the sign of the covenant, which the people, through the force of Jezebel, had rejected, but which now they would accept. The sign, to which he was referring, was the

Bris Milah, signified by his act of putting his head between his knees.

Thereafter, because he was zealous for this sign, he was to be the angel of circumcision.<sup>35</sup>

The rain finally came and Elijah, girding up his loins, ran before the chariot of Ahab to the gates of Jezreel. His strength to do so came from the hand of God which was upon him.<sup>36</sup> This was an unusual thing for him to do considering the trouble Ahab had caused him, and he, in turn, had caused Ahab. Josephus was under the impression that he ran along side of the chariot of Ahab, because he was under a "divine fury".<sup>37</sup> Conversely, another source stated that he was a herald for the king while running in front of the chariot.<sup>38</sup>

Once in Jezreel, Ahab informed Jezebel of the destruction of her prophets. In anger, she swore to kill Elijah, and sent him a message to that effect. Upon receiving her note, Elijah fled into the wilderness, leaving his servant lad at Beer Sheba. But why should he flee from Jezebel? Certainly a man capable of withholding rain, resurrecting the dead and effecting divine fire, need not be afraid of mortal death. Two answers to this question are given in the Zohar. Elijah fled because it is noticed that the righteous do not wish to trouble the Creator with the performance of miracles which may cause damage, as this one most certainly would have. Therefore, Jacob fled from Esau, Moses from Pharoah, and David from Saul; so it

was quite proper that Elijah should flee. In fact, under the Broom tree, he said, "I am not better than my fathers," that is, those who have had to flee at other times.<sup>39</sup>

The other answer is that he fled, not from fear, for he was not afraid of any man, but because he wanted to get the answer to the future at Mount Horeb. He knew that the angel of death had no power over him, because he was Phineas, but he wanted to know what God was planning to do with his body after his soul ascended to heaven.<sup>40</sup>

While in the desert, he was fed by an angel, who supplied him with cakes baked on hot stones. After the second meal, brought to him by the angel, he struck out into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights unto a cave on Mount Horeb. This cave was especially created between sundown and twilight of the first Sabbath to house both Moses and Elijah.<sup>41</sup>

There are many accounts of what happened in the cave, between God and Elijah. One source said that God, at first, spoke comfortingly to Elijah, but then added that Elijah did not teach virtue for the sake of Israel. When God saw that Elijah was unrelenting in his zealousness, He appointed him the angel of the covenant, and he would remain forever zealous, for the Lord, in matters of nakedness and circumcision.<sup>42</sup>

Another said, that Elijah accused the people in the same cleft of rock where God revealed himself to Moses as long-suffering. God, being merciful, would not stand for



Elijah's diatribes against the people, and, therefore, told him to appoint Elisha for a successor, with the admonition that it is better to defend the people than to accuse them.<sup>43</sup>

In the cave, Elijah was confronted with a great wind, an earthquake, a fire and finally, the still small voice of God. Actually, the wind, earthquake, fire and voice, which God sent before he revealed Himself, were sent expressly for the purpose of showing Elijah the destiny of man on earth. The wind represented this world, the earthquake, the death of man, the fire was the fire of Gehenam, and the still small voice was the final judgment when there is only God.<sup>44</sup>

Another source stated that these catastrophic occurrences were three classes of angels which God showed Elijah; the angels of wind, the angels of storm, and the angels of fire. And finally, God revealed Himself in the still small voice.<sup>45</sup> God spoke in the still small voice because he wished for mercy, and asked the question, "what are you doing here", a second time, to see if Elijah still desired vengeance.<sup>46</sup>

During their conversation, Elijah did not see God once, for no man is able to look at God and live. In fact, if there had been as much as a small hole in the cave Elijah would have been consumed by the passing celestial light.<sup>47</sup>

In the Biblical version of the incident in the cave, God tells Elijah to anoint, not only Elisha, but also,

Hazael and Jehu. The last two were not anointed by Elijah, but by Elisha. The Rabbis said that this is actually what is meant in the passage where God tells Elijah to anoint Hazael and Yehu; that Elijah is to anoint Elisha, who, in turn, is going to anoint the two kings according to the instructions of his master.<sup>48</sup> There is also an insult, directed at Elijah, in the passage telling Elijah to anoint Elisha. This was done, stated Rashi in his comment to this verse, because God does not want accusations against His son (Israel).

But Kimhi, did not see the insult in this verse. Rather, he stated that Elijah had wished for death in the wilderness and, therefore, had to leave a successor who would carry on his work. Elisha was the successor, chosen by God, to follow in the footsteps of Elijah and it was necessary that Elijah prepare him for the task.

After Elijah's meeting with God had ended, the prophet left the cave in search of Elisha, whom he later found plowing a field. And there, in the field, he designated Elisha as his disciple and successor.

The story now shifts to the treachery involved in Ahab's possession of Naboth's vineyard. Elijah is told, by the word of God, to go and predict a disastrous end to the house of Ahab. But after Elijah repeats these words to Ahab, the king repents greatly and adverts the evil decree, at least in his day.

Following another time lapse, during which Ahab has died, the story of Elijah continues with Ahaziah, the son

of Ahab, who had become seriously ill. In order to find out what the future had in store for him, Ahaziah sent messengers to a foreign god, for a prediction as to his recovery or death. Elijah met the agents of the king on the way, and told them that because of Ahaziah's apostasy he will now surely die. The messengers related the prophecy to Ahaziah; whereupon he asked the identity of the prophet, in the singular, Elisha must not have been with Elijah when the messengers met the latter; probably because Elijah was going alone upon one of the mountains, in prophecy.<sup>49</sup>

They described Elijah as a very hairy man, who had a belt of skin fastened about his loins. Elijah was such a hairy man that when people saw him they would mock him and say, "Behold, Elijah curls his locks".<sup>50</sup> One of the reasons Jeremiah regretted that he was a prophet was that he knew the fate of the other prophets, such as, Elijah, whom people mocked because of his abundance of hair.<sup>51</sup>

The belt of skin which he wore was taken from the ram that Abraham sacrificed instead of Isaac. This ram served all of the holy men of Israel.<sup>52</sup>

When Ahaziah heard the description, he knew immediately that it was Elijah, the Tishbite, and he dispatched two groups of fifty-one men each, to bring him back. But because of the arrogance of their leaders, and the fear of death which Elijah harbored, both groups were destroyed by a heavenly fire, which Elijah invoked. There were six

divine fires of destruction which God sent to the earth, and these which consumed the one hundred and two men, were two of them.<sup>53</sup>

The third group of fifty-one men were able to escort Elijah back to the king. There, at the bedside of the king, Elijah again accused Ahaziah of following in the evil footsteps of Ahab, his father, and further, told him that he would never rise again from the bed on which he lay. The prophecy came true and the king died, the last of the line of Ahab.

This, then, was the character of the legendary-Biblical Elijah as depicted by the Rabbis. But the story, as yet, is not complete, for there is still the translation scene, the scene which has impressed and puzzled men throughout the ages. The entire next chapter will be devoted to the discussion of the translation of Elijah, the prophet.

## C H A P T E R   I V

### THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH

The translation of Elijah, the miraculous event in which he rose to heaven alive, caused a great stir among the Rabbis and Aggadists. The ascension of Elijah was the seed from which there blossomed forth a multi-hued collection of legends concerning Elijah, his life and "death". Some of these come under our purview in this chapter.

Thus, one of the riddles that the Queen of Sheba had asked Solomon was, "who was he that was born and died not?" Solomon replied, "both Elijah and the Messiah." Here, we note that the translation of Elijah was regarded as foreseen in Solomon's day. But an even prior prediction came to Jacob in his first prophetic dream. God, in his vision, showed him among other miracles--the translation of Elijah.<sup>2</sup>

Elijah also knew that he was to be translated to heaven, and even more, he had prescience of the exact day on which it was to take place. At the moment when he was to depart from the earth, he wanted to be alone and, therefore, tried to leave Elisha behind. But Elisha refused to foresake him, for he, too, knew that his master was to be translated.<sup>3</sup> In fact, even the professional prophet, in both Beth El and Jericho, knew of the impending ascension and approached Elisha with the knowledge of his master's departure. From both groups of men, Elisha asked for

silence; he was distressed enough at the prospect of Elijah's translation and needed no reminder.

After Elijah and Elisha had left Jericho, fifty of these aforementioned prophets followed them and stood on the opposite bank of the Jordan, in anticipation of the forthcoming scene. Elijah, in order to cross over the Jordan, split the river with his wondrous mantle and walked, with Elisha, to the other side, where he was to be translated. While they were passing through the Jordan, Elisha asked that a double portion of the powers of Elijah be granted to him. His desire would be fulfilled, said Elijah, only if he were able to witness the translation scene (II K.2.10). And while they were crossing over, they were engrossed in a learned discussion of Torah. The angel who had been sent to bring Elijah up, could not, in all good conscience, interrupt their conversation. But in order to complete his task, he was forced to send a fiery chariot, drawn by horses of fire, to separate them and end their discussion. Only then was he able to bring Elijah up "in a whirlwind of the heavens".<sup>14</sup>

At the moment of Elijah's translation, the voices of thousands of prophets were silenced and their prophetic ability taken away. However, Elisha, who had been able to witness the scene, was the lone exception, and his powers were double to those of his master.<sup>15</sup>

But the translation was not accomplished without some heavenly dissention. The angel of death had argued with

God about the advisability of allowing a man to enter heaven alive. God had replied that He had created the heavens with the express purpose of causing Elijah to enter alive into them. To this, the angel of death answered that this unusual event would give man an opportunity to gossip (pischon peh).. Whereupon God answered, with an air of finality, that Elijah is not like any other man; he is so powerful that he could, if given the opportunity, drive the angel of death from the world. With this answer, God ordered the angel to get himself down. But as he was descending, Elijah spied him and engaged him in battle; a siege wherein Elijah would have killed him, except for the intervention of God. Not being allowed to destroy the angel of death, Elijah nevertheless, forced him under his feet and flew to heaven on him.<sup>6</sup>

Kimhi, commenting on the translation scene, said that Elijah was made spiritual while his body was being consumed in the heavenly fire. Thus, what Elijah saw was only a likeness of the fiery chariot and horses as Elijah was being translated. And when the Bible states that Elijah and Elisha were separated by these instruments of heaven, it simply means, that Elijah, at that time, was in the heavens and everything, except the mantle, which fell on Elisha, had been burned.<sup>7</sup> But Kimhi goes on to ask, if the clothing of Elijah was burned, how did the mantle escape the conflagration, and conversely, if the mantle fell on Elisha, why not the rest of the clothing? Further, if Elisha had a double portion of Elijah's miraculous power, then

why did he need the mantle at all? He leaves these two questions unresolved in his commentary.<sup>8</sup>

But there were many divergent and disagreeing voices among the later Rabbis, concerning the corporeal ascension of Elijah. In the period of the Tannaim, c. 100 C.E. to 220 C.E., there was the opinion that neither Elijah, nor any other Biblical character ever really ascended the heaven.<sup>9</sup> Both the Septuagint and the Targum on Second Kings 2:1 opposed the popular view of Elijah's translation.<sup>10</sup> Josephus, in Antiqui, stated that Elijah disappeared from among men so as not to let anyone know that he had died, and this was the reason that the author wrote the translation scene.<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Yose, who lived a generation after Josephus, stated that neither Moses, at the time of the revelation on Sinai, nor Elijah, ascended to heaven. Further, he postulated that the permanent abode of Elijah is a spot close to heaven, but not heaven itself.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, there were many sources which claimed that Elijah definitely rose to and resided in heaven.<sup>13</sup> In fact, after he had successfully completed his mission to the people, during the reign of Ahab, he was even appointed the guardian angel of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

But the later Aggadists who agreed to the fact that Elijah had been translated, disagreed as to the method of his translation. As we have seen, Kimhi believed that his ascension was one of the spirit alone, and that his body was destroyed in the fire (see note nine).<sup>15</sup>



Whereas the Zoharic writings proposed the theory that even though Elijah's soul was separated from his body, at the moment of his translation he donned a celestial body which enabled him to ascend to the heavens. Further, his terrestrial form was not burned, but left intact in the whirlwind, so that he can clothe himself in it whenever he returns to earth.<sup>16</sup>

As I see it, there were very definite reasons as to why the translation scene was so hotly disputed among the Rabbis. The major factor in this consideration was the emergence of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> In the main, the translation scene made Elijah a unique character within the Old Testament, and due to its mystical and supernatural aspects, laid the foundation for further legends and tales concerning the prophet and his appearance to man on earth.

## CHAPTER V

### ELIJAH AND THE MESSIAH

After Elijah had been translated to heaven; was he still active in the affairs of men? The Rabbis and the Aggadists answered this question with a deliberate yes. Their proof came from, no less a source, than the Old Testament itself. In Second Chronicles 21:12, a letter from Elijah was delivered to the wicked king Jehoram, scolding him for his evil and idolatry. This letter evoked much interest among the Rabbis, because, according to Biblical chronology, it came seven years after Elijah's translation. In this light, the teachers and sages of Israel expounded the belief that Elijah, though in heaven most of the time, returns to earth and participates in the activities of mankind. With this groundwork laid, a whole new group of legends, far more vast than those adorning the Biblical narrative, were written about Elijah. In post-Biblical times, the Elijah legends dealt with everything from talking animals to the heralding of the Messianic age.

The Messianic lore, connected with Elijah can be found within almost all of the totality of Haggadic literature. There is some controversy among certain Aggadists. The question arose as to whether Moses or Elijah would be the legitimate forerunner of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Midrash

Davarim Raba states that God promised both Moses and Elijah the privilege of being sent at the end of days.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas, Pesikta Rabatai states, after making a comparative study of the merits of Moses and Elijah, that Moses was only chosen for the temporary task of redeeming Israel from Egypt; Elijah has been chosen, by God, to redeem Israel in the Messianic age.<sup>6</sup>

The belief that Elijah was Phineas also played a part in the determination of this role. Because, said some, Phineas (Elijah) made peace between God and Israel, he shall establish peace between God and the world, by being the forerunner of the Messiah.<sup>7</sup>

This popular belief among Jewish teachers also spread to Christian authors. Justyn Martyr, c. 100 C.E.,<sup>8</sup> said that there was an old Jewish belief that Elijah will anoint the Messiah.<sup>9</sup> There is a marked tendency within the New Testament, codified about 175 C.E.<sup>10</sup> and especially within the Synoptic Gospels, to identify John the Baptist with Elijah, making him the forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus. In Matthew 11:10, Jesus paraphrased the last verses of Malachi, and announced that John the Baptist is the one who has come to prepare the people. Later, in the same chapter, Jesus said to the people, concerning John, "and if you will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come" (11.14). In Matthew 17:12, Jesus was questioned by his disciples as to why the "scribes" said that before the Messiah can come, Elijah must appear. He answered his disciples' inquiries by saying: "but I say to you that

Elijah has already come, but they did not know him, but have done to him whatsoever they listed."

The book of Luke begins with the story of an angel who predicted the birth of John the Baptist to childless parents. The angel said that the son, John, "shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:17).

But in the book of John, when John the Baptist was asked directly if he is Elijah, he replied with a denial (1:21). Later, in the chapter, John accuses his inquisitors of not knowing "he--- whose coming after me is preferred before me" (1:27). This statement could possibly be construed to mean that John admitted that he was Elijah and the one "coming after" him was the Messiah.

In the book of Mark, there are also the reports of the disciples to Jesus as to whom the people think he is. The people, said the disciples, mistakenly believe Jesus to be Elijah, or some other prophet (6.15 and 8.28).

Thus, we may assume, that by the date of 175 C.E., and later, the role of Elijah as the herald of the Messiah was known by, at least, some of the more influential teachers and writers, who considered his coming to be the natural order of events directly preceding the arrival of the Messiah.

There were a few, whose ideas, concerning Elijah's Messianic role, were more radical. They held that Elijah

was to be, in truth, the Messiah himself. The statement in Ecclesiasticus 48, "that Elijah is to restore the tribes of Jacob", implies a Messianic mission for the prophet.<sup>11</sup> Even in later Rabbinic sources he is considered the Messiah. In some places he is even referred to as "Goel"-the redeemer,<sup>12</sup> and his name-Elijah- was believed to be one of the names of the Messiah.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in order to coincide with the accepted concept that the Messiah must be of the Davidic line, they named "the son of David" Elijah.<sup>14</sup> But the number of times he is considered the Messiah is small, and was probably the opinion of very few.<sup>15</sup>

#### ELIJAH'S MESSIANIC ACTIVITIES

The legendary Elijah finally became, to the Rabbis, a sine qua non for the appearance of the Messiah. One of the reasons given for opening the door for Elijah, the prophet, at the Pesach seder, is that the children should be inculcated with the knowledge of the true sign of the coming of the Messiah, which is, the appearance of Elijah.<sup>16</sup> But what will happen when the Messiah is about to come? Herein lies Elijah's main Messianic activities.

In a Rabbinic legend, alluding to Micah 5:4, it is stated that when the time draws nigh for the Messiah to commence his work, he will be surrounded by a council of seven shepherds and seven princes. Elijah is listed as one of the princes.<sup>17</sup> Three days before the coming of the Messiah, Elijah will appear in Palestine and proclaim "peace upon the world". Two days before the coming, Elijah

will proclaim "good upon the world". And on the last day prior to the arrival of the Messiah, Elijah will announce, "salvation upon the world".<sup>18</sup>

After Elijah has made the three proclamations, he will disappear and Michael will blow the trumpet. Then Elijah will again appear, but this time to introduce the Messiah. To prove that he is Elijah and that the one whom he is introducing is the promised Messiah, Elijah will perform eight miracles. Those who will be present, when he reappears, will ask him to raise a dead man. This he will do immediately. To further convince the people, he will raise all the dead whom they personally knew. After he has performed the miracles, he will blow the shofar at the Messiah's bidding, and peace will come upon the world.<sup>19</sup>

Another version of the appearance and introduction of the Messiah, is that Elijah, with the rest of the righteous, will file out into the desert, and there they will remain for forty-five days. At the end of that time, they will all come out led by the Messiah, who, then will start the work of redemption.<sup>20</sup>

Still another account of the events leading up to the salvation of the world, places the majority of the redemption in the hands of Elijah. He will appear and announce the coming of the Messiah by asking the people to repent. Then he will proceed to restore peace and harmony in the world by resolving all legal and ritualistic problems. In short, his task will be to remove every obstacle from the

path of salvation.<sup>21</sup>

### ELIJAH'S INTERIM ACTIVITIES

Until the coming of the Messiah Elijah performs many activities which, due to the lack of time and space, I shall not discuss in this dissertation. Rather, I shall briefly mention only those activities associated with the Messianic aspect of his role.

Elijah, as depicted in Haggadic works, was intimate with certain men, whom he favored. And upon request, he supplied them information about the Messiah. Once, Rabbi Joshua b. Levi, who was a particular friend of the prophet's was introduced by Elijah to the Messiah, who, at that time was standing by the gate of the poor in Rome. When asked when the Messiah will make his appearance he answered that he was planning to come that day. Elijah later explained to Rabbi Joshua that the Messiah was ready to come and redeem Israel at any time if they would only prove themselves worthy of redemption.<sup>22</sup> At another time, in answer to the questions of Rab Yehuda, Elijah said that the world will stand for 6000 years, or no less than eighty-five jubilee years, before the coming of the Messiah. But at what time of that year, he did not know.<sup>23</sup>

However, there were some questions which he should not have answered even though they were asked by his close friends. Elijah told Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi, that if Rabbi Hiya and his son would pray together their prayer would be so effective that the Messiah would be forced to come. Upon

hearing this, the father and son began to pray together. When word of this betrayal of a heavenly secret reached heaven, Elijah was lashed sixty times with a whip of fire for imparting this knowledge. When his punishment was over, he went back to earth and appeared as a bolt of fire between Rabbi Hiya and his son, to end their prayer and again find favor in the sight of the heavenly hosts.<sup>24</sup>

When Elijah is not among men he dwells in the highest level of paradise with the three patriarchs and the Messiah.<sup>25</sup> Here he comforts the weeping Messiah, who is suffering from the afflictions placed upon him for the atonement of the sins of Israel. Elijah consoles the Messiah by placing his head in his bosom and reciting the glories of the coming Messianic age.<sup>26</sup>

#### ELIJAH'S ROLE DURING THE MESSIANIC AGE

Elijah's task is not completed after he introduces the Messiah, for after the Messianic age has come to the world he will be the expounder of law, having the same relationship with the Messiah as Aaron had with Moses.<sup>27</sup>

During the Messianic period, Elijah will restore all the hidden vessels and concealed objects of the Temple which were put away by Josiah when destruction was imminent.<sup>28</sup> In this time, he will also be one of the cabinet of eight presided over by the Messiah. He will teach the babies of wicked people, who had died in childbirth, because of the sins of their fathers to plead with God for the life of their fathers.<sup>29</sup>



Sometime after the inception of the Messianic age, Elijah will go into combat with the prince of Edom-satan- and with the assistance of God, slay him.<sup>30</sup> The final act of Elijah's career will be to slay Samael and by doing so banish evil from the world forever.<sup>31</sup>

Thus Elijah is a most important figure in the Jewish concept of the Messianic salvation of the world. It is impossible, said the sages of old, to achieve a Messianic age without the agency of Elijah.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY

Elijah, as we have seen, was important to the Rabbis and story tellers of Judaism and Christianity, not only from a Haggadic point of view, but also in a theological sense. In later literature he became, ostensibly, the peg on which the hopes and aspirations of the Jewish people were hung.

The Biblical story, with its many and diverse miracles acted as a catalyst on the minds of later Jewish authors and eventually snowballed into a multitude of legends and folklore. But the story in First and Second Kings was not the genesis of the Elijah legends. Further, it was only a link in the development of the character, Elijah.

I have already stated in note 8 what I believe to be the central event of the whole story of Elijah, the episode on the top of Mount Carmel. Except for the translation and splitting of the Jordan scenes, which were performed before Elisha and an esoteric group of fellow prophets, the Carmel contest was the only public miracle performed in the entire narrative.

Up until then he had sworn a famine upon the land, but the actual miracle of the withholding of the rain would be done by God; after which he was fed in the cave by the

ravens, during which time he was absolutely alone. He received the widow's son in the solitude of his room with no witnesses present and his conversation with God, in the cave was also in isolation from other human beings.

The Carmel miracle may or may not have happened in the history of the people. I personally believe that some events, with some prophet, must have taken place on the top of Carmel; an event in which this prophet was the primary character and which, in turn, gave him a miraculous reputation. Other than this occurrence, I would venture to say that the people knew nothing about him. This is, in my opinion, verified by the absence of accurate historical material appended to the tale, concerning him. It is very surprising to see a major character within the Bible without a brief genealogy ascribed to him. And the contradiction as to when the house of Omri would fall (during the days of Elijah or Elisha) points to the fact that the talespinner had a difficult time placing Elijah within the chronology of the period.

The sacrifice on Carmel left a deep impression in the consciousness of the people and offered much material for their imaginations. Herein lies the origin of the Elijah tale... Many of the miracles ascribed to him in the Biblical narrative are extremely similar to other miracles found in the Old Testament.

The resuscitation of the widow's son is similar, in supernatural intent, to the reviving of Samuel by the Witch

of Endor. Elijah's sojourn in the wilderness for forty days is reminiscent of Moses at the top of the mountain for forty days. The splitting of the Jordan distinctly parallels Moses' splitting of the Red Sea and the conversation with God in the cave on Horeb is like the theophany of Moses on Sinai. The miraculous moment on Carmel is the lone exception. It alone sounds as if it was original in the mind of the author; probably because something similar happened on Carmel, as I have mentioned above.

But it is not my purpose to analyze and trace the origins of all these legends. Rather, to discuss the possibilities of Elijah's popularity among the Haggadic writers.

Elijah is definitely a product of the Haggadic mind, but a mind which knew human nature. Elijah was very much like the average person, at times exhibiting charity and sympathy, at other times being irascible and vindictive. In certain tender moments he is kind and gentle. All of this, combined with his charismatic nature, supplied grist for the imaginative mill of the Haggadists. He was easily identifiable with the average man except for his ability to perform outstanding miracles. Within the Biblical narrative he scolds kings and is scolded by God; he demands favors and does favors; he threatens annihilation and is threatened with destruction, and with discretion being the better part of valor, he flees from his enemies.

But the supernatural elements which separate him

from man were not the main concern of the author, for if they were, Elisha, who duplicated his master's miracles twice-over, would have captured the Haggadic mind. Actually, there is some doubt as to the authenticity of the Elisha tale, in that it seems to be a continuation of the Elijah story, by another author who was unoriginal enough to have to use the miracles of Elijah for his character.

Elijah appeared at a crucial time in the history of Israel. Intermarriage had produced a foreign element among the ruler powers; foreign worship was creeping into the lives of the people, and a tyrannical queen who espoused these elements, held the control of the country in her hands. But Elijah, whose name literally means, "Yahweh is my God", suddenly appeared on the scene, destroyed the Baal worship (supposedly) and the prophets of the cult, and restored the pure worship of Yahweh again to the land and the people. What an impression this must have made...A fighting evangelist unexpectedly appeared in their midst and performed an unbelievable feat before their eyes and then promptly disappeared again. Here was a mysterious character, not only to the people to whom he showed himself, but to those who for centuries transmitted his name and his deed to following generations, each time adding a little more to the story. This oral tradition, embellishing the Carmel incident, was circulated among the people until it was considered important enough to include within the Canon.

Why was Elijah chosen? Just for the reasons I have stated above. The other prophets who appear in the Old

Testament, whether they were the later preaching prophets or the earlier miraculous prophets., were familiar individuals, with knowable geneologies and histories. It was difficult to adorn their lives with a multitude of supernatural tales, because too much was known about them.

But a man who came from nowhere, who astonished the people with hyperphysical might and then disappeared, was a total mystery and mysteries have always attracted the imagination of man.

This, in my opinion, is the origin and the reasons for the development of the Elijah legends. A man who did not die must, of course, live on, and so he does - in the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people.

## NOTES--CHAPTER I

1

All the Biblical references in the first chapter are to the book of K. I, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the text.

2

He is called "the Tishbe" because he may have come from an area, or possibly, a family with that name, "Tishbe". According to Tobit 1.2, a place with that appellation was located within the boundaries of Naphtali; but the statement that he was one of the dwellers of Gilead refutes the above conjecture and may cause us to assume that "Tishbe" was a family name.

3

The statement in which Elijah claims that he will withhold the rain and dew is more or less exceptional in the history of the pronouncements of the prophets. This implies that Elijah had it within his power to control the elements. Most likely the author, or authors, intended to show the magnitude of his greatness through this statement.

4

His flight after pronouncing the famine upon the land was most likely due to the fear of the revenge of Ahab and Jezebel, although this is not explicitly stated.

5

The drying of the brook was, most probably, the author's way of showing the length of time the curse had been affecting the land. It could have possibly been the author's intention to also show that God wanted the prophet to relieve Him of the curse made in His name, but which he was obliged to fulfill as long as the prophet desired it.

6

THE JEWISH ENCYCLOPEDIA. Isidore Singer, ed., New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., (1901), Vol. V, p.121.

7

The miracle of reviving the widow's son verified that he was a man of God, at least to the widow. This proof, once established, would stand in good stead for him if there would be anyone who might doubt his word. He also had a living witness to his powers in the person of the widow. This resurrection of the dead later became an important act in the repertoire of the miracle working prophets, such as Elisha. It is interesting to note that there is a very similar tale concerning Jesus in the book of Luke, (chapter 7, verses 11-16), in which Jesus raises the widow of Nain's son from the dead, at which time he also was proclaimed a great prophet.

8

As I state more thoroughly in chapter six, I believe the incident on Carmel to be the actual core of the Biblical story of Elijah, the prophet. This, probably did happen, or, at least something similar to it which left a deep impression on the minds of the people. Around this core the

rest of the story evolved. The miracle and the prophecies were, most likely the products of imaginative minds who considered the prophet on Carmel, a great wonder worker and seer. Each time the story was retold another facet was probably added until we have the version of Elijah that appears within the canon. It is interesting to note, however, how Elijah was identified with the mountains, referring to his initial victory on Carmel. The fifty prophets who doubted his translation thought that possibly the spirit of the Lord might have wafted him to some MOUNTAIN or valley.

9 A literary hyperbole the author used to emphasize the power and heat of the fire.

10 It is very possible that in using the still small voice as the vehicle through which God spoke to Elijah, the author intended to show that God wanted kindness, mercy, or a temperate acceptance of the problems which had beset Elijah. It may also have been a refutation of a theory which may have been prominent in that day, when this was written, that Yahweh was a god of holocaust and anger.

11 Here we see Elijah assuming a role very similar to the role of Nathan, the prophet, in the court of David; that is, one of a censor of the king's actions.

12 This reversal on the part of God indicates two things within the story; first, the tale spinner who conceived this story had to align Elijah's actions with the chronology of the history of Israel; second, that this is a necessary illustration of the mercy of God vis-a-vis the vindictive traits of Elijah. Perhaps this is to cast an unfavorable light upon Elijah so as to justify his disappearance in the following chapter.

13 This is a duplication of the miracle Moses performed at the Red Sea.

14 The author of the legend made the translation of Elijah credible by not only having Elisha and the fifty prophets witness it, but also by having a search party of fifty prophets look for Elijah in the countryside. The results of their search proving futile meant that Elijah must have gone to heaven.



## NOTES--CHAPTER II

- 1 Seder Aliyahu Rabba we-Seder Eliyahu Zuta (Tanna Debe Eliyahu. Friedmann, M. ed. Vienna: Verlas Der Israel, Theol. Lehranstalt. (1900), 15. 199.
- 2 Ginzburg, L. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. (1924, 1955, 1946, 1954), Vol. III, p. 462.
- 3 Esfah in Yalkut I. 73b as cited in Ginzburg, *ibid.* Vol. III, p. 250.
- 4 The speculations (which tribe) were most likely caused by the discrepancies in genealogies appearing in I Chr. 8.27, where Elijah is mentioned as belonging to the tribe of Benjamin; and Ezra 10:21 and 26, where two Elijahs are mentioned as sons of priests. Of course, the reason he may have been accredited to the tribe of Gad is because of the significance of the name "Gad" which literally means "god fortune." This is closely in line with Elijah's messianic role. Further, in the Biblical account, he is mentioned as a dweller of Gilead which was in the region of Gad.
- 5 Judges 21.10.
- 6 Rowley, H. H. The Growth of the Old Testament. London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd. (1950), p. 59.
- 7 The Jewish Encyclopedia. Singer, Isidore, ed. New York, London: Funk and Wagnalls Co. (1901), Vol. I, p. 280.
- 8 Ps. Philo 48. as cited in Ginzburg, *op.cit.* Vol. VI, p. 184, note 19.
- 9 Pirke Rabbi Eliezer. Friedlander, G, ed., New York: Bloch Publishing Co. (1916), p. 44.
- 10 Origen "In Joan" as cited in Ginzburg, *ibid.*
- 11 Ma'ayen Ha-Hokmah, pp. 60-61 as cited in Ginzburg, *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 114. Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M. ed. Vienna: J. Kaiser, (1880), pp. 20, 98a; 25. 128a.
- 12 Rosenberg. Eliyahu Ha-Nabi. Lodz: (1913), p. 10. Elijah was basily identified with Phineas because there is no mention of the latter's death nor the former's birth. The rabbis found a common personality trait between them and

utilized it to make the identification. They were both extremely zealous for the covenant and the doctrines of God.

<sup>13</sup> Emek Ha-Melek, p. 175c as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. IV, p. 202.

<sup>14</sup> Ginzburg, L. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Abodah Zarah, (Babylonian Talmud - English Translation). London: Soncino Press. (1938), p. 18b.

NOTES--CHAPTER III

- 1 Kimhi to K. I 17.1 as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, Warsaw, (1874).
- 2 Pirke Rabbi Eliezer. Friedlander, G. ed., New York: Bloch Publishing Co. (1916), 44. 183a.
- 3 Rashi to K. I 17.3 as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.
- 4 Hullin (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation). London: Soncino Press. (1938), 5a. Midrash Bereshit Rabbah as contained in Midrash Rabbah. New York: Mop Press, Inc. (1949), 33.6.
- 5 Kimhi quotes this opinion in his commentary on K. I 17.4, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, *ibid.*
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 Ginzburg, L. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. (1924, 1955, 1946, 1954), Vol. VI. p. 317, note 7. If the opinion of Ginzburg here is correct and Aphraates is following a Jewish tradition, then it was at a comparatively early date that Elijah was considered a priest and, possibly, identified with Phineas.
- 8 Midrash Tanhuma. Buber, S. ed; as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p. 317, Note 7. Tan. Mass'e, *ibid.*, 8. Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op. cit. 23.9. Midrash Wayikra Rabbah, *ibid.*, 19.1.
- 9 Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) op. cit. 108. Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op. cit. 33.15.
- 10 Mitzdat David to K. I 17.6, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.
- 11 Rashi, *ibid.*, 17.7.
- 12 This scene parallels quite closely the scene of Rebecca at the well, Rashi, *ibid.*, 17.10.
- 13 Kimhi to K. I 17.9 as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.

- 14 ibid., 17.15.
- 15 Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) op. cit. 113a. Midrash Davarim Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabah, op. cit. 7.6. Mid Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M., ed., Vienna: J. Kaiser, (1880), 42.178a. Midrash Tehillim, 78.346, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p.318, note 12. Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op. cit. 73.4. Ta'anit, (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) op. cit. 2b.
- 16 Kimhi to K. I 17.21 as cited in Mikraot Gadolot. op.cit.
- 17 Sifre debe Rab. Friedmann, M. ed., New York: Om Publishing Co., (1948), 342. Midrash Tannaim, 208, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p.167, note 965. Aboth d' Rabbi Nathan, ibid., 37.95.
- 18 Midrash Tehillim 68.318., as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. III, p.84.
- 19 ibid.
- 20 Yebamot (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) op.cit. 90b. Yerusalmi Ta'anit 2, 65a, as cited in Ginzburg, Vol.VI, p. 319, note 13.
- 21 Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah as contained in Midrash Rabbah op. cit. 23.9. Midrash Tanhuma, IV.165 as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. IV, p. 196. Tan. Maase, ibid., 8.
- 22 Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M. op. cit. 14.13a. Midrash Shemot Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op.cit. 15.15. Yalkut II, 214 on K. I 18.26, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. IV, p. 198.
- 23 Rashi to K. I 18.30, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.
- 24 Berachot, (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation), op. cit. 6b. Midrash Aggadat Bereshit 76.147 and 148, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p. 319, note 13.
- 25 M'Tzudat David to K. I 18.31, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.
- 26 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah-Seder Eliyahu Zuta (Tanna debe Eliyahu). Friedmann, M. ed., Verlas Der Israel, Theol. Lehranstalt. (1900), 17.87.

27 Kimhi to K. I 18.34, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.

28 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah we-Seder Eliyahu Zuta (Tanna debe Eliyahu), Friedmann, M. op. cit. 17.87.

29 Midrash Aggadat Bereshit 76.148 and 149, as cited in Ginzburg op. cit. Vol. VI, p. 320, note 18.

30 Berakot (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation), op. cit. 31b-32a.

31 Theodotian on Genesis 4.4 as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. V, p. 135, note 10. Aggadat Shir Ha-Shirim, as cited in Ginzburg, ibid. 6.10.

32 Seder Elyahu Rabbah etc. op. cit. 17.87.

33 Rashi to K. I 18.42, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit. Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim, 25a, as cited in Ginzburg op. cit. Vol. IV, p. 199, note 20. Midrash Aggadat Bereshit, ibid., 76.149.

34 Midrash Wayikra Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op. cit. 31.4. Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, ibid., 11.2. Pesikta de Rab Kahana 30, 192, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, pp. 320-321, note 22.

35 Rashi to K. I 18.4, as cited in the Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.

36 Josephus Antiqui, 8, 13.6, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VII, p. 321, note 22.

37 Mekilta Bo, ibid., 13.14a.

38 Zohar Bereshit 209, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p. 321, note 25.

39 Ibid.

40 Kimhi to K. I 19.9, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op. cit.

41 Rosenberg. Eliyahu Ha-Nabi. Lods, (1913), p. 17.

42 Seder Eliyahu Zuta, Friedmann, M. ed., op. cit. 8.186. Midrash Aggadat Shir-Ha-Shirim 8.45, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. IV, pp. 199-200, note 27. Zohar I, ibid., 209a-209b.

43 Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op.cit. 24.4. Midrash Wayikra Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op.cit., 15.1. Yerusalmi Berachot 9.13a, as cited in Ginzburg, Vol. IV, p. 200, note 29. Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, op.cit. 1.6. Midrash Kohelet Zuta, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. 87.30.

44 Targum K. I 19.11, as cited in Ginzburg, Vol. VI, p.322, note 30.

45 Mitzudat David to K. I 19.13, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op.cit.

46 Megillah (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation), op.cit. 19b.

47 Kimhi to K. I 19.15, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, op.cit.

48 *ibid.*, K. II 1.7.

49 Midrash Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M. ed., op.cit. 26.129a.

50 Ginzburg, L. The Legends of the Jews, op.cit. Vol. IV, p.293.

51 *ibid.* Vol. I, p.283.

52 An unknown midrash quoted by Rabbi Bahya on Leviticus 9.24, cited by Ginzburg in Vol. III, p.244, note 461.

NOTES--CHAPTER IV

1 Ginzburg, L. Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. (1924, 1955, 1946, 1954). Vol. IV, p.148.

2 Ibid., Vol. I, p.351.

3 Rosenberg. Eliyahu Ha-Nabi. Lodz: (1913), p.19.

4 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah. Friedmann, M. ed., Verlas der Israel, Theol. Lehranstalt. (1900), 5.22-23.

5 Seder Olam 21, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol.IV, p.239, note 1. Tosephta Sotah, ibid., 12.5. Ekah 4 (end) ibid. Megilla, (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation), London: Soncino Press, (1938) 14a.

6 Zohar Hadash Ruth 1.1, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. IV, p.201, note 33. This story is comparable to the struggle between Moses and Samuel at the time of the former's ascension to heaven. Cf. Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol.III, p.466 seq.

7 Kimhi to II K. 2.11, as cited in Mikraot Gadolot, Warsaw: (1874).

8 The obvious answer to the question of the mantle of Elijah which Kimhi is either sublimating or doesn't recognize, (which I doubt) is the miraculous powers invested in the garment. Elijah was able to split the Jordan with his mantle. Thus, the passing on of the mantle suggests a handing down of prophetic authority to his disciple, Elisha. It is very similar to a magic wand concept, in which the one who possesses it, at the moment, has the complete power contained within it. It could not be burned because it was miraculous, nor could Elisha have duplicated the miracles of his master without it, assumed the author of the tale.

9 Midrash Bereshit Rabbah, as contained within Midrash Rabbah. New York: Mop Press, Inc. (1949). 38.9. In the same vein they also oppose any visible manifestations of God and deny that the Shekinah ever comes to earth.

10 Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. VI. pp.322-23, note 325.

11 Josephus. Antiqui 9,2.2, as cited in Ginzburg, ibid.

12 Sukkah. (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) op.cit. 5a. Mekilta Bahodesh, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. 4.65b.

13 Erubin. (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation), op. cit. 45a. Babba Batra, ibid., 121b. Seder Olam 1, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit., Vol. IV. p.202. 2 Aboth d' Rabbi Nathan, ibid., 38.103.

14 Ginzburg, L. op.cit. Vol. VI, p.325, note 39. Other than Elijah, both Moses and Enoch, upon their ascensions to heaven became angels and performed services as angels. Cf. Ginzburg, Vol. V, p.157, note 58. In the discussion of the spiritual translation of Elijah, Friedmann, in his introduction to Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, pp. 14-20, states that the concept of the translation of the soul alone is completely foreign to the older sources and what is actually meant is an ascension of both body and soul.

15 Contrary to Ginzburg, who states that he feels the statement of R. Jose, who said that neither Moses nor Elijah ever ascended to heaven, is not anti-Christian. (Cf. Ginzburg, Vol. 6, pp.322-323, note 32); I believe that this is the basis for most of the conjecture on the translation scene. The Rabbis, in combating a fast-rising Christian sect, sought to rid their tradition of anything which may sound similar to the stories concerning Jesus. Thus, they sought to discard the idea of a corporeal translation of Elijah who went to reside in heaven.

R. Yose, living about 130 C.E., was most likely in some sort of contact with Christianity and the Jesus legend of resurrection. Perhaps he felt that if he could prove that Elijah never went to heaven, it would also serve to prove that Jesus could not have effected such a miracle. After all Elijah is the only Biblical character whose translation is explicit within the pages of the Bible, and since the belief was popular among the people due to this legend, then they could accept Jesus' resurrection as well.

The great amount of agreement he received to his attempt to disprove Elijah's translation shows that there was an effort to unite forces and combat the rapidly expanding Christianity, and end an increasing apostasy. Obviously the attempt was too weak or too late, for the tradition had become too widespread among the people and could not be dislodged from their minds.



NOTES--CHAPTER V

1 There is some doubt as to the indigenous character of these verses within the original message of Malachi, with the general conclusion being that they were appended later. Cf. Bewer, J. A., The Literature of the Old Testament, New York: Columbia University Press, (1922), p.409.

2 Eduyoth (The Mishnah-English Translation). Danby, Herbert. London: Oxford University Press, (1933). Chapter 8, Mishnah 7.

3 Ibid.

4 Sifre debe Rab. Friedmann, M. ed., New York: Om Publishing Co., (1948), p. 335. Targum Yerusalmi Deuteronomy 33.21, as cited in Ginzburg, L. The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. (1924, 1955, 1946, 1954), Vol. 6, p. 167, note 966. Midrash Aggadat Bereshit, ibid., 67.133. Midrash Tannaim, ibid., 219.

5 Midrash Davarim Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah. New York: Mop Press, Inc. (1949) end and 3, end.

6 Pirké Rabbi Eliezer. Friedlander, G. ed., New York: Bloch Publishing Co., (1916) 40. Targum Yerusalmi, Exodus 4.13, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. II, p.325. Pesikta Rabati, as cited in Rosenberg, Eliyahu Ha-Nabi. Lodz: (1913), p.4.

7 Yelamdenu in 'Aruk, s.v. Zarua and in Yalkut 1.771, as cited by Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. II, p.389, note 804. Midrash Aggadat, Numbers 25.13. Ibid. Targum Yerusalmi, Numbers 25.13. ibid.

8 Encyclopedia Britannica. Yust, Walter, ed., Chicago; London, Toronto: William Benton, (1955). Vol. 13, p.213c.

9 Justyn Martyr. Dialogue 49, as cited in Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI, p.340, note 112. Later Jewish writers, such as the Karaite, Joseph Ha-Levi, also mentioned this function of the prophet.

10. Sandmel, Samuel. A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, (1956), Chapter I, p.13.

11 Ecclesiasticus. (The Apocrypha-English Translation). New York: Tudor Publishing Co. (1936) 48.10-11.

12 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah. Friedmann, M. op. cit. Intro. pp.27-37.

13 Midrash Mishle 19.87, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. V. pp.130-131. Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op. cit. 15. Sukkot (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation) London: Soncino Press, (1938) 52b.

14 Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. VI. p. 339, note 105.

15 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah. Friedmann. op.cit. Introduction pp. 25-37.

16 Rosenberg, op. cit. p. 66. from the Hagadot of Halevi.

17 Ginzburg, op. cit. Vol. V, p. 130.

18 Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M. ed., Vienna, J.Kaiser, (1880). 35.161.

19 Otot Ha-Mashiah. 62. as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. IV. p.234, note 112. Teffillet R. Simon. ibid., 125. Aggadat Shir Ha-Shirim. Ibid., 7.44, note 113. Pirke Mashiah Ibid 72, note 114. Pirke R. Yoshiyahu, Ibid, 115. In the "Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba" (31) it is God who blows the Shofar, not Elijah.

20 Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann. op. cit. 15, 72a-73a. Midrash Shemot Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah, op.cit. 5.2. Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah op. cit. 11.2. Pesikta L'Rab Kahana, 5,49a-49b, as cited in Ginzburg op. cit. Vol. VI, p.340, note 112. Pirke Mashiah, Ibid., 72. Shir. Ibid., 2.9. Aggadat Shir Ha-Shirim, Ibid., 5.38.

21 Pirke Rabbi Eliezer, Friedlander. op.cit. 43 & 47. The actual emphasis is this phase of Elijah's messianic role is the restoration of family purity as shown in Friedmann's Introduction to Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, op.cit. p.20-24.

22 Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation). op. cit. 98a

23 Ibid., 37a.

24 Baba Metzia (Babylonian Talmud-English Translation). op.cit. 85b.

25 Ma'aseh de Rabbi Joshua b. Levi 48-49, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. V, p.32, note 97.

26 Konen 29, as cited in Ginzburg. op. cit. Vol. VI, p.341, note 115. Ma'aseh Rabbi Joshua. Ibid., 50.

27 Zohar III, 27b-28a, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. IV, p.233, note 110.

28 Mekilta Wa-Yassa 5.51b, as cited in Ginzburg, op.cit. Vol. VI, p.19, note 112. Mekilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai Ibid., 80. Shekalim, ibid., 6.49c.

29 Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, as contained in Midrash Rabbah op.cit. 4.1.

30 Abkir in Yalkut 1.133, as cited by Ginzburg op.cit. Vol. I p.393.

31 Ibid., 153.

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

In assembling this bibliography I have divided the material, used for writing this dissertation, into two basic sections. The first of these sections is the primary sources used in gathering information about Elijah, as found in the legends as they have been transmitted to us. There is only one of these sources which I will discuss. In general, I would advise the student who wishes to involve himself in this topic to gain more than a cursory knowledge of Hebrew, so as to be able to deal properly with these primary sources. It is extremely important that he have some knowledge of the Mishnaic and Talmudic, as well as the Midrashic idiom, so as to better handle the material found in these books.

- 1 Midrash Rabbah. New York: Mop Press, Inc., (1949).
- 2 Mikraot Gadolot, (including commentaries) Warsaw: 1874.
- 3 Pesikta Rabati. Friedmann, M., ed., Vienna: J. Kaiser, 1880.
- 4 Pirke Rabbi Eliezer. Friedlander, G. ed., New York: Bloch Publishing Co. (1916).
- 5 Seder Eliyahu Rabbah we-Seder Eliyahu Zuta (Tanna debe Eliyahu). Friedmann, M. ed. Vienna: Verlas Der Israel, Theol. Lehranstalt. (1900).
- 6 Sifre debe Rab. Friedmann, M. ed. New York: Om Publishing Co. (1948). The book to which I was referring is Friedmann's Seder Eliyahu Rabbah. If for nothing else, the introduction to the subject which Friedmann presents is invaluable for the study of Elijah, and the concepts contained therein give a clear insight into the age in which the legends developed. Much of the opinion expressed in this thesis is basically derived from Friedmann's treatment

of the subject,

In discussing the secondary sources, I shall first treat them in order of importance and relevance to the subject, and then, give an alphabetical listing of the material.

I have found the treatment of the subject of Elijah in the Jewish Encyclopedia to be, by far, the most concise, and yet, considering the limited space, quite inclusive. It is, in my opinion, the best general treatment of the topic and would give the average reader a clear understanding of the stories of Elijah and critical comments.

The copious work by Ginzburg, The Legends of the Jews, is the most inclusive source I found. He has collected most of the tales concerning Elijah and much of my outside research was mere duplication of the material I gleaned from his work. But there are some serious difficulties with the presentation of the subject in The Legends of the Jews. The text is somewhat threadbare and this is caused, most likely, by the attempt to squeeze too much material into a limited space. The results, therefore, are too often merely allusions to the legends concerning Elijah, rather than a full treatment. Herein is where the notes are most valuable because through them one can find the source (although the reference is sometimes incorrect) and seek out the original legend for himself. I, in this study, have found some of the most valuable material buried in the notes, while there appeared in the text a cursory treatment. Reading the text can prove tiresome, due to frequent interruptions and

irrelevant writing on the part of the author. I have found that the text does not always follow the natural sequence of the story which also proved difficult and confusing, but it is still a valuable source book for the legends surrounding most every Biblical character.

After dealing with Ginzburg, I did research in Rosenberg's Eliyahu Ha-Nabi which, in the main, I found to be a duplication of the sources which I had found in Ginzburg. Rosenberg's work is written in simple Hebrew, which should prove to be a little less difficult for anyone with any experience in Midrashic Hebrew. His book is entirely composed of legends divided into sections which follow the life and roles of Elijah. All of the legends he has gleaned from other Aggadic literature, but it seems as though he was not willing to give credit to these writings for his notes are extremely poor. It was very difficult to find a completely documented source in the entire work. Being a compendium of legends he fails to give the student the proper references, and thus complicates the task.

Most of my Talmudic research was done in the English translation of the Babylonian Talmud, published by Soncino. I would not recommend this to anyone who has no experience in the Talmudic idiom. In dealing with Midrash, I grant, that the language of the compilers is fairly simple, but the English is archaic and the concepts become foggy in the overabundance of words. If one has had some experience in the original Talmudic language they will find their task

greatly simplified while searching through Soncino.

My criticisms of the Danby Mishnah are not as harsh as they are concerning the Soncino Talmud. But Danby also uses archaic English and, at times, confuses the reader with his poor handling of the idiom.

The study by Dr. Isaiah Wasselevsky of the prophet, Elijah, is basically a brief treatment of a few of the legends surrounding the Biblical Elijah. In his little book, which I would call aspirational, he sermonizes about the personalities of the main characters in the Biblical narrative of Elijah and concludes with a plea for the Messianic Age.

The Elijah Apocalypse is an interesting document, which I had hoped to include within the framework of the thesis, but it would have entailed a much lengthier treatment of the subject which was not my purpose at this time. Perhaps, in the future, I will be able to pursue the topic to its final and complete conclusion.

The rest of the books, I will list, were basically used for specific information and reference. They do not, in the last analysis, reflect on the basic conclusions drawn nor are they intrinsically involved in the subject itself. Therefore, I shall refrain from making any judgments concerning them.

The secondary sources used for this thesis are:

1. The Apocrypha (King James Version). New York: Tudor Publishing Co. (1936)

2. Bewer, J.A. The Literature of The Old Testament.

New York: Columbia University Press. (1922).

3 Buttenwieser, M. Die Hebräische Elias-Apokalypse.  
Leipzig: Verlag von Eduard Pfeiffer, (1897).

4 Danby, H. The Mishnah. London: Oxford University  
Press. (1933).

5 Encyclopaedia Britannica. Yust, W. ed., Chicago,  
London, Toronto: William Benton Publisher. (1955).

6 Ginzburg, L. The Legends of The Jews. Philadelphia:  
The Jewish Publication Society of America. (1924, 1955, 1946,  
1954).

7 The Jewish Encyclopedia. Singer, Isidore. ed., New  
York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Co. (1901).

8 The New Testament. (King James Version). Chicago, Akron,  
New York: The Gaalfield Publishing Co.

9 Rosenberg. Eliyahu Ha-Nabi. Lods: (1913).

10 Rowley, H.H. The Growth of The Old Testament. London:  
Hutchinson and Co., Ltd. (1950).

11 Sandmel, Samuel. A Jewish Understanding of The  
New Testament. Cincinnati; Hebrew Union College Press. (1956).

12 Wasselevsky, Isaiah. Elijah: Prophet and Myth.  
Manchester: New Israel Publishing Society.