

## Elijah and the Earthquake

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*Summary: Elijah's experience (1 Kings 19:9-18) is consistent with modern earthquake research, but God's communication is less in the macro-phenomena than in the small interior voice*

Elijah is in a cave, wanting to resign as prophet – deep in burnout probably – following a bruising encounter with Queen Jezebel.

God says to go out of the cave and stand before him. But before he does there is a strong wind, an earthquake, a fire, and only then does he go out and hear the voice of God.

I'm suggesting that the three prior things are also often recorded in the scientific literature.

Although it only happens in a minority of cases, strong very transitory winds may be associated with earthquakes. There is some confusion in accumulated experience whether this is before or after the quake. The mechanism could be earth movement creating a sudden pressure change over a large area, analogous to a hydraulic ram but on a very large scale., (Soter 1999: 1995, Greece), (Ikeya 2004: various dates, Japan), (Ulusoy & Ikeya 2008: 1999 Turkey), (Rogers 2013: 1848, 1855, New Zealand), (Fuller & Buckley 2015: 2015, Nepal), (Daneshvar & Freund 2017: 2015, Chile).

From the cave Elijah could see fire. A cave in a desert environment will not be in a forest, so this was not a forest fire. Is there anything else natural it might be? Accumulated published scientific papers including mine (Whitehead & Ulusoy 2013; Whitehead & Ulusoy 2015; Whitehead & Ulusoy 2019) lead me to believe this may be earthquake light. Most reports of light associated with earthquakes are at the same time as the earthquake, and only a few are before and after. The reports are from night-time quakes so the light is visible – it is possible Elijah's experience was at night? Just possibly – after the fire he wraps his face in his cloak then goes out. In day-time bakingly-hot conditions perhaps he might be less ready to do that? Not strong evidence, but a possibility.

Earthquake light at night is usually blue-white and in form is the upper half of a dome on the ground. It doesn't look much like fire. It is over in half a second, hence is really a flash, and is caused by momentary separation of shallow buried electrical charge which causes the colours when it hits air. However, some records describe glows, after the earthquake, and lasting minutes rather than less than a second. The colour of glows is towards the red end of the spectrum, and observers sometimes think it is fire, like a volcanic eruption. (Grapes et al. 2003: 1848, New Zealand), (Davies et al. 2003: 1998 PNG ), (Ikeya 2004: various dates, Japan), (Ulusoy & Ikeya 2008: 1999, Turkey). Shorter red flashes are sometimes recorded (Fuenzalida 2008: 2007, Peru). The red light is most often seen when the earthquake is in the far distance.

It is not these dramatic events which speak to Elijah, but a still small voice. I suggest that will mostly be the case for us whether we see earthquake light or not!

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